

LWF Studies

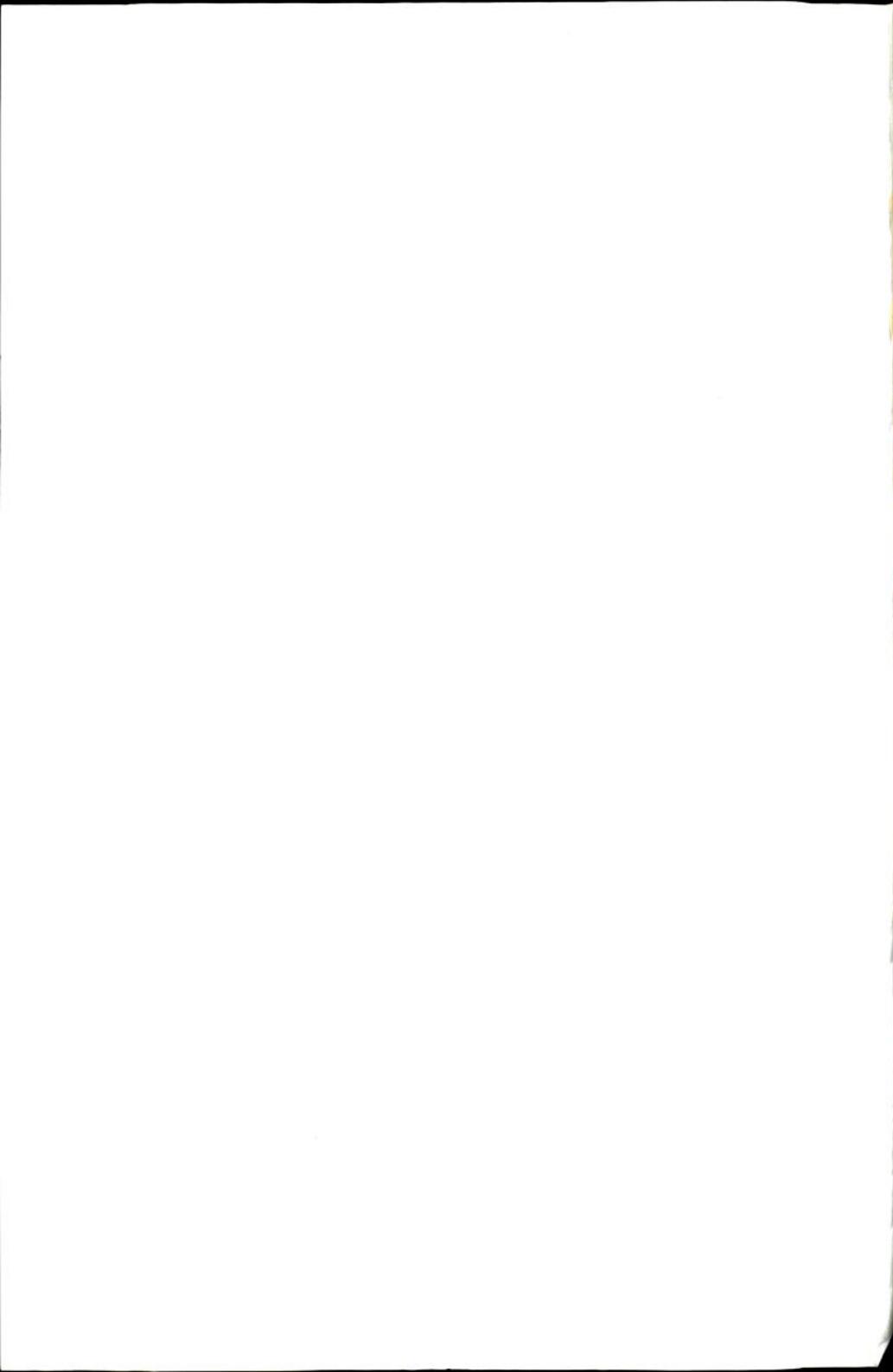
The Role and Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church in China

China Study Series Vol.3

June 1997







China Study Series Vol. 3

**The Role and Interpretation of the Bible
in the Life of the Church
in China**

The Lutheran World Federation

1997

First Printing 1997

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Lutheran World Federation Preface

The Lutheran World Federation has had an interest in China, the Church in China and the Chinese churches since its very beginning. Already at its founding Assembly in Lund in 1947 a Chinese theologian and pastor was present, Rev. P'eng Fu.

In the years 1971 - 83 the LWF undertook a major study that became known as "The Marxism and China Study." The purpose was "to provide a forum through which the Lutheran churches together with others, can examine and evaluate the challenge of different forms of socialism (especially the Chinese) and what this challenge means for the mission of the church." In a subsequent document the objectives were defined: On the one hand to hear and understand what the new value systems and ways of life have to say to the church, on the other hand to understand what the Gospel has to say and how to express the Christian witness clearly and forcefully in new situations.

That is what we always are called to, so when the General Secretary of the LWF, Dr. Gunnar Stalsett in 1992 reiterated a quest for a new China study his proposal was met with widespread approval. In his report to the LWF Council coming together in Madras, he included the following paragraph:

Let me place before you a very specific and urgent point

in this context. Having this year again visited the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, I am seized by the importance of 'everything Chinese' to the future of humanity. We are speaking about a fifth of the world's population, one of the most ancient cultures and religious-based value systems in the world. The major part of this Chinese community is under a social and political system which has failed in other parts of the world. Tiananmen Square and Tibet are names that continue to mobilize strong concerns for human rights. A worship service which I was privileged to attend in downtown Beijing with old and young worshipers, most of them with their Bible printed in China in their hands, gives cause to a nuanced assessment of the future of religious freedom. LWF conversations with government officials in China and Geneva over the past few years likewise give reasons for a cautious optimism about a place for the Christian church in this largest nation of the world....

The challenge of China today and tomorrow suggests a special study program for the period of 1994 to 1997 to be lodged in the Department for Theology and Studies and working integrally with the Department for Mission and Development, especially its Asia Desk and with the member churches. The China study carried out in the Studies Department during the years 1971--1983 might serve as a background, but its orientation must be more focused and

church oriented. Given the post-denominational orientation of Christianity in the People's Republic of China and the distinct confessional identity of our Chinese member churches, it will be imperative that the ecumenical and confessional aspects of Christian presence and witness within the Chinese culture be taken seriously. (Agenda, Meeting of the LWF Council, 1992, Exhibit 8, paras. 110, 111).

This suggestion was referred to the Program Committee for the Department Theology and Studies which discussed it at some length and the Committee VOTED

that, in response to the General Secretary's suggestion for a "new China Program," the DTS staff be requested to undertake, in cooperation with the DMD and in consultation with the church in China and the Lutheran Chinese churches, a feasibility study on goals, content and method, and submit it to the next Program Committee/Council meeting; (Proceedings of the LWF Program Committee for Theology and Studies, 1992, p. 5).

This decision was endorsed by the council with the request that the program be developed in close cooperation with the church in China and the Lutheran Chinese churches. One of the goals of the study should be to enable the churches better to proclaim the Gospel.

Upon this recommendation a number of consultations and

explorations were done with Chinese church leaders and Bishop K.H. Ting of the China Christian Council. The feasibility study showed the need for such a study and after further investigations the program finally was approved at the Council meeting in Kristiansand 1993 and a plan for its development was presented to the Council in Geneva in 1994.

The background for this positive reaction and interest in the church in China was formulated thus:

Already the demographic realities make it obvious that everything Chinese will be of importance in the years to come and that the impact of Chinese culture reaches far outside mainland China. This influence is also considerable within the churches. Seen from a historical perspective the missionary concern for China has been high on the agenda. The church in China has been in the hearts and on the minds of many Christians and it has been remembered in many prayers, especially in times when Christians have been undergoing experiences not so very different from those of the early martyrs. Because of a certain inwardness of Chinese culture one could easily be led to bypass China. This would however be to the detriment of the rest of the world. Furthermore, there seems to be little doubt that with the financial and economic revival of the whole of South Asia China will gain in importance for the whole world.

In the churches in the Lutheran communion we must prepare ourselves for the importance of the reality of every thing Chinese. So the world outside China is in need of information and communication. Here it is often mentioned that there is something to be learned from the history and struggle of the Chinese. Structures have developed and missiological methods have been used which need to be studied. This also goes for the specific Chinese spirituality and the many examples of inculturation which the history of Christianity in China and among the Chinese shows.

On the other hand there is for the church in China and among the Chinese and among people and churches outside of China a need to reflect on the experiences of the church in China and the Chinese churches. It might not be possible in a study to grasp the soul of the church in China but there are lessons to be learned.

On May 17, 1994 the formal launching of the China Study program took place in Hong Kong at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. At this ceremony it was again stressed that there is much to be learned from studying the history of Christianity and the present development of the church in China. At this occasion I mentioned:

In this day and age it is not always easy for an

international organization such as the LWF to take new initiatives. There are times when it seems to take all one's resources simply to keep going. Nevertheless one does know that if as an organization one does not renew oneself one will not live up to one's purpose. Thus the taking of a new initiative is to be seen as a sign of life and hope and to my mind the launching of the new program on China is precisely that: A sign of life and hope.

I am a member of the wider community of Lutheran churches who hopes to learn considerably from this study. I am quite sure that I shall. Already the two years we have spent preparing the study have been most instructive. Amongst other things I have been taught modesty and humility in the face of the vastness of the subject and its potential importance.

The response to this study has been quite incredible. We in the Department for Theology and Studies are called to encourage and assist sound theological reflection in the member churches. Taking our confessional heritage as the point of departure we reflect on issues which challenge the present understanding of Christianity. Thus all our programs deal with the wider issue of gospel and culture. Hence the gospel and how it relates to the Chinese culture will be an integral part of this program.

Some of you may be aware of the fact that from 1971 to 1983 the Federation already conducted a China Study. This study gave rise to quite some controversy and I believe that so far there has not been a final analysis or evaluation of this program. The study just like any other project was very much a product of its time. During the period of isolation the study certainly helped stimulate interest in China and in what was going on in China. If today we look back at the project a number of questions need to be asked. This might in fact give us a good starting point for our new venture.

Arne Sovik concludes his evaluation of the first China Study with the following words:

... General interest in China is concerned with its increasingly capitalist economy, the question of human rights and a certain unease about the future of the country. Will it evolve, as its wealth grows, into an aggressive national power in the Far East? Or will it be preoccupied with maintaining the unity of the nation by the force of a traditional nationalism combined with military power?

From the Christian point of view, interest in China is high, and the constantly changing scene raises many questions. Is the remarkable growth of the church in China, the reported interest even of some philosophical intellectuals in the

Christian world-view evidence that the Gospel is finally rooted there? Can Christianity become, even if it remains a small minority, a significant element in the post-Maoist society? Will growth continue? Or does the desperate shortage of leadership and the ubiquity of heresy mean that the reality of Chinese Christianity is less impressive than the inflated numbers that are cited even by official sources? Will the future shatter the fragile unity that is based on external threats? Starting with these, questions abound.

Questions have been abounding. They have been challenging us. With the China Study program we hope to provide some information that can help shed light on those questions.

The China Study Series is created to make the insights from the study available to a wider circle of interested people. It has from the beginning been the intention of the study program to reach out across confessional, regional and other borders. The program has from its outset been designed in an inclusive way. Therefore a group of consultants were formed in Hong Kong that could serve as a sounding board for the China Study committee and the research team. And from the beginning the program has been endorsed by the ecumenical partners, the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia.

Information is sometimes defined as the difference which

makes a difference. By initiating this study the LWF hopes to make a difference, perhaps only that little difference which like the salt keeps the whole body safe and sound.

Viggo Mortensen

Director, Dr. theol.

Department for Theology and Studies

The Lutheran World Federation

November, 1996



China Study Series Preface

The LWF's interest in China and China Studies has already been clearly outlined in Professor Dr. Viggo Mortensen's very enlightening LWF Preface. The genesis of the current China Study Program of LWF began in 1992 in the form of a request made by the former General Secretary, Dr. Gunnar Stalsett in his report to the LWF Council which met in Madras, India. Dr. Stalsett's emphasis on the importance of "everything Chinese" to the future of the world gained the strong support of the LWF leadership. The Program was approved by the Council in 1993 for an initial three-year period and was formally launched on May 17, 1994 at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong with four clearly stated purposes:

1. To increase the understanding of the situation of the Church in China.
2. To learn from the faith and experience of Christians in China.
3. To express solidarity with the Church and Christians in China.
4. To help prepare for the LWF Assembly in Hong Kong in July, 1997.

For logistics purposes the Program is located at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong with the Seminary's President, Dr. Lam Tak Ho as the coordinator. The China Study Committee which accompanies the Program is chaired by Prof. Dr. Choong Chee Pang of Singapore. Prof. Dr. Viggo Mortensen, the Director of the Department for Theology and Studies of LWF oversees the whole Program. A Research Team, comprised mainly of LTS staff and a Research Secretary, Mr. William Mak Wing On, was also formed.

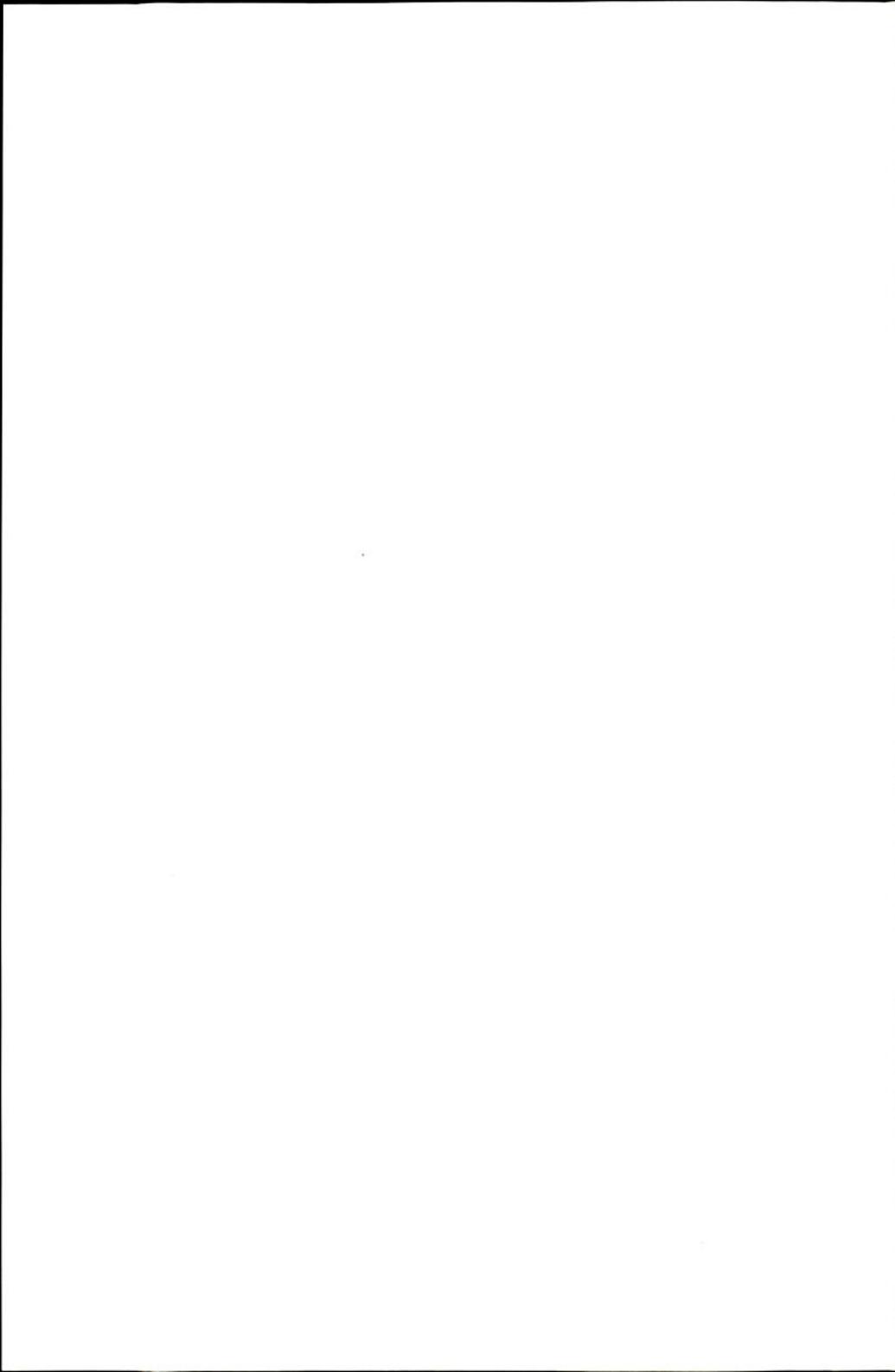
The first China Study Committee meeting, with the participation of some of its consultants, was held from May 16 to 18, 1994 in Hong Kong. The second committee meeting took place in Hangzhou, China, from June 4 to 6, 1995. The third meeting is now scheduled for March 7 to 11, 1997 in Hong Kong.

In spite of some initial difficulties, especially in the area of coordination and research, the Research Committee has so far managed to complete three very broad areas of studies: An Overview of Contemporary Chinese Churches (main contributor: Dr. Lee Chee Gong); Understanding The Lutheran Churches (main contributor: Dr. Andrew Hsiao), and The Situations of Women in the Church in China. The fourth area of studies is now on the Role and Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church in China.

Looking back to the past two and a half years of operation, some of the strengths as well as limitations of our logistics are quite apparent. Much time and attention will be devoted to the evaluation

of the Program at the March, 1997 Committee meeting in Hong Kong. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express my grateful thanks to all those who have a part to play in what we believe to be a very worthwhile and exciting LWF project, especially to Prof. Dr. Mortensen for this insightful leadership, to Dr. Lam Tak Ho and his dedicated Research Committee and Research Secretary based in LTS, Hong Kong. We have just received very encouraging news from Geneva that the LWF Council, at its recent meeting in September/October, 1996, has decided to extend the China Study Program for an additional three years to the year 2000. We take this decision as a strong endorsement of the importance of the Program as we move forward, by the grace of God, to the next century-the dawn of a new millennium!

Prof. Dr. Choong Chee Pang
Chairman
The China Study Committee
November, 1996



Foreword

The China research project was first proposed in 1992 by Dr. Gunnar Stalsett, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, and the proposal was accepted by the acting committee of LWF in 1994. Dr. Viggo Mortensen, director of the research department, and Dr. Lam Tak Ho, president of the Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary, were appointed for the organizing of the China Research Centre in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was chosen as the research base because it is geographically a gateway into China, and will become part of China itself on July 1, 1997. Rich resources on China can be obtained here, and academic research can be done freely as well. It is also very convenient if there is the necessity to go into China to collect information, to do research or to hold meetings.

The opening ceremony of the China Research Centre was held at the Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary in May, 1994. Well-known scholars in China and around the world have been invited to be consultants of the Centre, with Dr. Lam as the coordinator, and a team of six professors from the Seminary as the research committee. It is under their guidance that research is done.

“The Situations of Women in the Church in China” and “The Role and Interpretation of the Bible in the Life and Witness of the Church in China” are the two themes that the Centre has been assigned. The results will be promulgated through seminars and publications.

The outline and direction of this report, “The Role and Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church in China”, was proposed by the China Study Committee in June, 1995 in Hangzhou, China. During that meeting, the members of the China Study

Committee gave their valuable opinions to this report. The Members attending that meeting were: Dr. Viggo Mortensen (director of the research department of LWF), Dr. Choong Chee Pang (chairperson), Members: Dr. Andrew Hsiao, Dr. Thomas Yu, Rev. Daniel Chong, Dr. Notto R. Thelle and two representatives from China, namely Rev. Kan Bao Ping and Mr. Chen Xi Da.

The final outline and direction of the report was determined by the Research Committee. The Committee invited famous scholars to write several papers and presented them in the Bible Consultation held on March 8, 1997 in Hong Kong. {The members of the Research Committee are: Dr. Lam Tak-ho (chairperson), members: Dr. Nicholas Tai, Dr. Andres Tang, Dr. Ted Zimmerman and Mr. William Mak Wing-on (research secretary)}.

Over fifty scholars participated in the Bible Consultation, they were professors from Hong Kong seminaries, scholars from different China Study Centers in Hong Kong and missionaries. There was very good discussion on the topics. This book is the result of the Bible Consultation. The book consists of four sections and an appendix. Sections of the book are corresponding to sections of the Bible Consultation.

Section One consists of a paper, "Contemporary Interpretation of Scripture in China" written by Rev. Ji Tai, a professor at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in China and a response from Dr. Nicholas Tai, a professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong.

Section Two consists of a paper, "A Defense For Spiritual Interpretation of the Chinese Church" written by Dr. Leung Ka Lun, director of the Christianity and Chinese Culture Study Centre in Alliance Bible Seminary, Hong Kong, and a response from Dr. Ted Zimmerman, Dean of Studies at Lutheran Theological Seminary in

Hong Kong.

Section Three consists of a paper, "Reading Lamentations 1 in Light of Qing-hen: A Rhetorical Analysis from a Chinese Perspective" written by Dr. Royan S. C. Yuen, a pastor of Life Lutheran Church, California, U.S.A. and part-time lecturer of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and a response from Dr. Andres S. K. Tang, a professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong.

Section Four consists of a paper, "The Role of the Bible in the Growth of the Church in China" written by Rev. Lo Chen Feng, a professor at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in China and a response from Dr. Andrew W. M. Ng, a professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong.

The Appendix consists of a paper, "Bible and Chinese Women" written by Ms. Chi Ren Hua, a woman Bible Teacher at the North East Bible Seminary in China. This paper was not presented in the Bible Consultation and it is only a sharing from a woman Bible Teacher.

Dr. Lam Tak-ho

President of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong

Coordinator of China Study Program

April, 1997

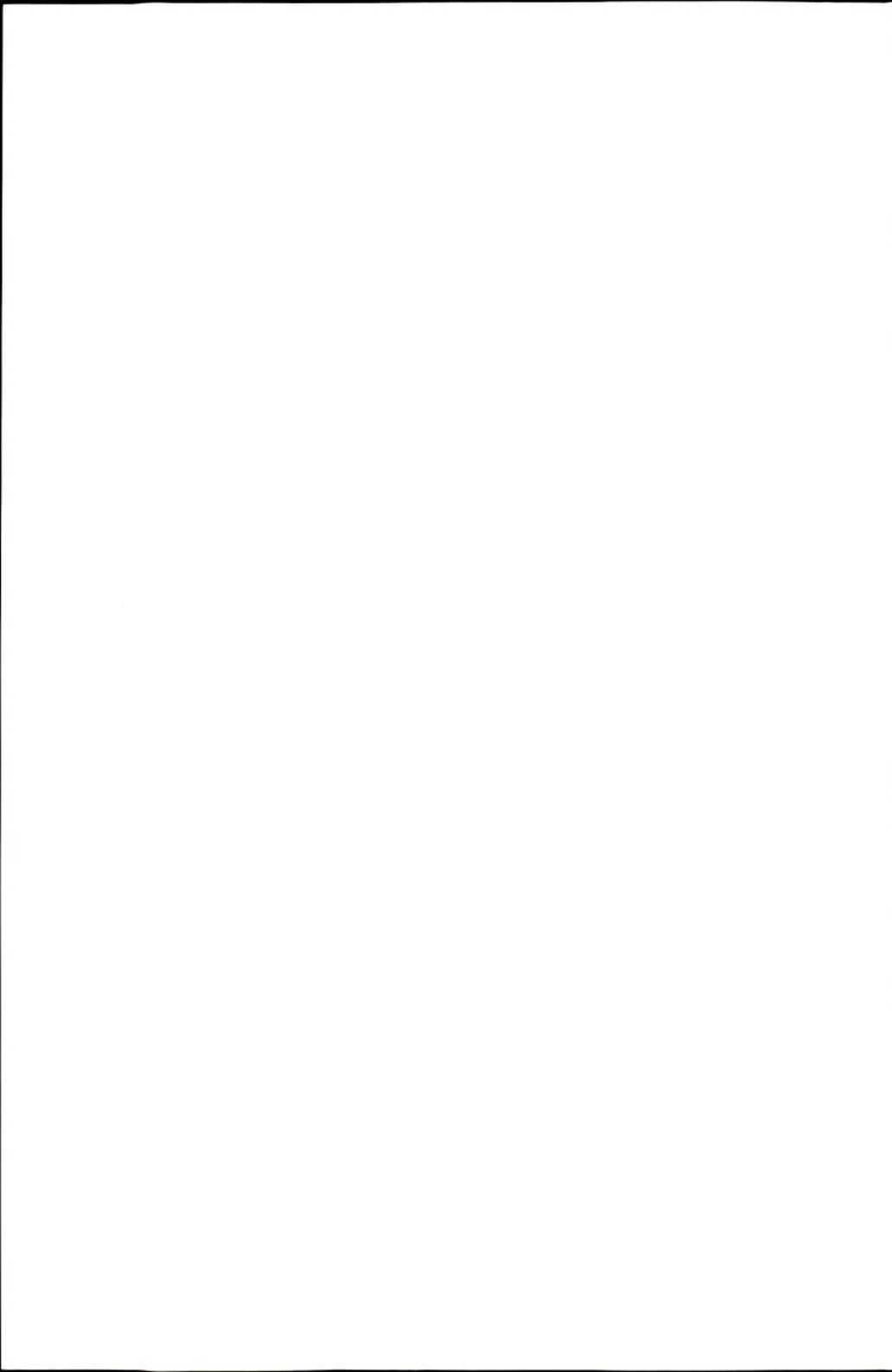
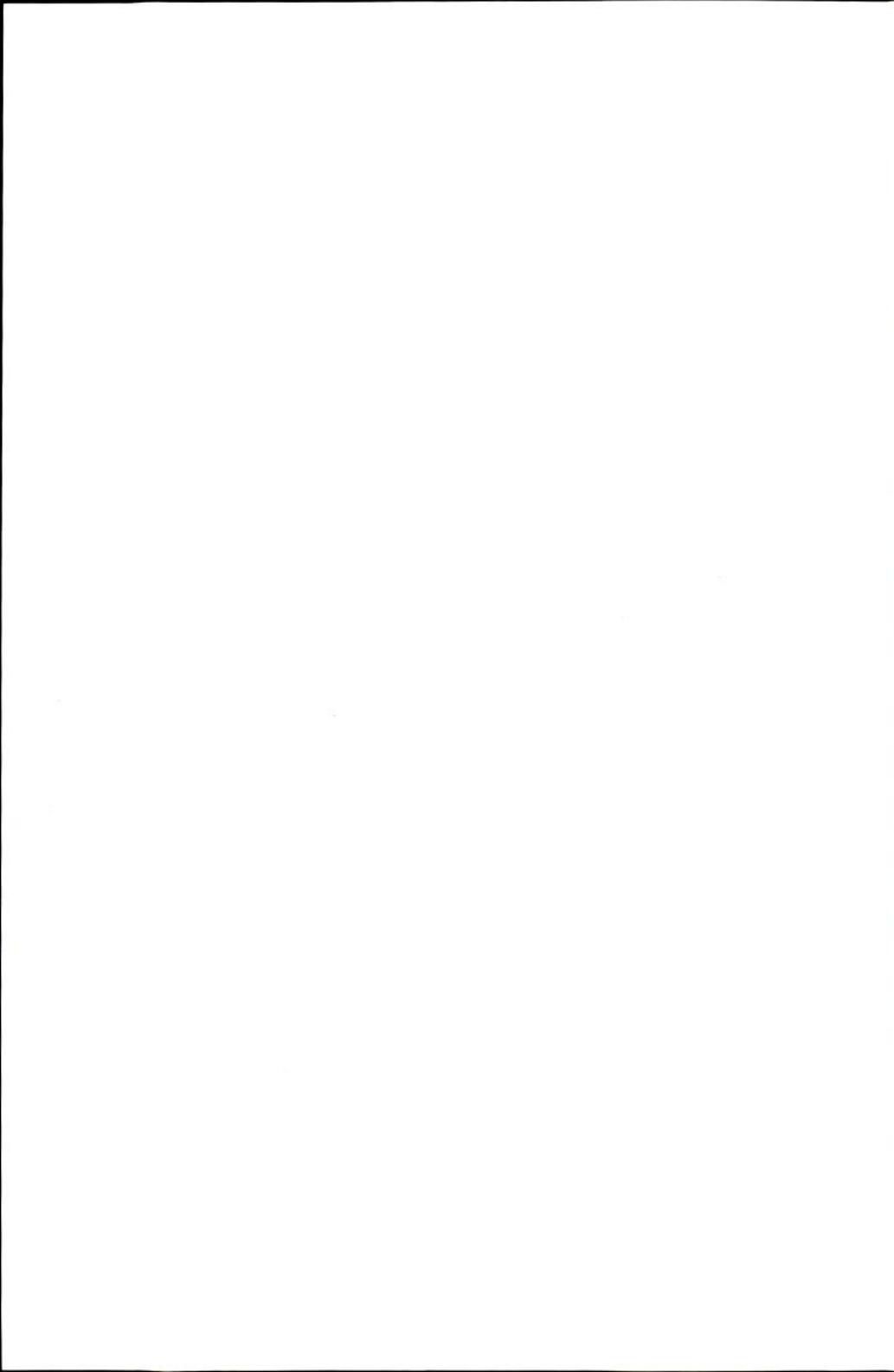


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Section One



Hermeneutics in the Chinese Church

Rev. Ji Tai
Professor, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary
China

Translated by Dr. Janice Wickeri

Though Christianity's entry into China can be traced back a thousand and more years to the Tang dynasty, it did not truly take root there until a hundred or so years ago. If we consider the "standard translation" -- the Union Version -- the Protestant translation of the Bible into Chinese has a history of no more than eighty years. From a scholarly viewpoint, in comparison with the West, biblical research in China has only just begun. Previously, commentaries have mostly been translations and introductions of Western works. Recent years have seen the appearance of some original work drawing on the Western foundation. If we turn to the life of faith of the church over the course of a long period of evangelism and pastoral work, however, we see that the form of biblical understanding and interpretation in the Chinese Church has gradually taken on definite special features. These are the important components of theology in the Chinese Church.

This essay will attempt to provide a preliminary description and critique of these features and to form some opinions on the course of future developments. Your comments, as co-workers in the Lord, will be most appreciated.

A. Understanding of the Bible

Before I begin my examination of the special features of

hermeneutics in the Chinese Church, I would like to take a look at the way in which most people in that church approach the Bible. For the principles and methods by which an individual or a church interpret the Bible are determined by their basic attitude to scripture. What kind of book or books is the Bible after all? This sort of topic may be pretty old hat in the West, but in China more and more people are taking it up.

1. The Bible is “Inspired” by God

“All scripture is inspired by God” (2Tim 3: 16). This is a common article of faith accepted by nearly all Christians, but the meaning given to “inspiration” is a case of everyone according to his or her own lights. Since the majority of Chinese Christians hold to a traditional evangelical faith, “inspiration” has been understood in terms of dictation, recording every jot and tittle, which is to say that the majority (especially older Christians) still hold to “the doctrine of inspiration”. And what is more, a large number of people believe in the inerrancy of the written word, even in translation. Perhaps we can call this type of understanding a “broad doctrine of inspiration”. I have recently been involved in the work of revising the translation of the Bible and regularly receive letters from Christians who question or disagree with this or that word or punctuation in the new edition. These reflect the feelings of many people that “not one jot or tittle of the Bible (read Union Version) may be changed”.

Another approach may be termed a narrow “doctrine of inspiration”. Jia Yuming translated the Western term ‘Dictation Theory’ as the “theory by which both the linguistic and spiritual meaning of language is revealed”, which he affirmed and explained as follows: “This is not to say that the Bible has been copied over and again or translated and retranslated without the least error, every word accounted for, but means that the original words of the Bible are all inspired and absolutely inerrant.”¹ This type of understanding is still representative of the view of the Bible held by many evangelists and believers.

The Protestant approach has always been to see the Bible as the highest authority. Our Chinese tradition of respect for the classics adds another important factor in shaping an extremely fundamentalist view of scripture. Rev. Jia quoted Confucius to emphasize the importance of the Bible’s language: “A single word can prosper a nation, a single word destroy it.”² Furthermore, most Christians, including some evangelists, are ignorant of the original languages of the Bible and its transmission history, a situation which has contributed to “inspiration theory” being accorded a dominant position.

Along with increasing access to a number of Bible editions and the continual growth of knowledge of the Bible, there is a gradual shift from a broad “inspiration theory” to a narrow “inspiration theory”. Furthermore, while it is affirmed that “the Bible is God’s

word written down by people through the prompting of God's spirit,"³ attention is turning to "the formation of the Bible as a text, a process which includes both God's revelation and human participation. Humans are finite, incomplete beings. Where humans are involved it is difficult to avoid inadequacies."⁴ From this it can be seen that people are moving from an understanding that the Bible is "literally inspired by God" to one which sees the Bible as "in essence inspired by God."

2. The Bible as "Scientific" Truth

In today's world, with the spread of education and rapid technological development, the question naturally arises: What is the relationship between the Bible and science? This question takes on special importance for our youth, who have received from primary school to university an education that is scientific and atheist. In this age where science reigns supreme, people are fond of asking: "Is the Bible scientific?" The response of most Christians is that the Bible is in accord with science. For example, a pamphlet very popular among Christians says that Isaiah 40: 22 - "It is he (God) who sits above the circle of the earth", - shows that 2500 years ago, God had revealed the true shape of the earth to humankind through the mouths of the prophets.⁵ Many sermons dwell with relish on the fact that this or that great scientist is a Christian and believes in the Bible, as proof that there is no conflict between science and scripture.

The minority of scholars who are more highly educated do not of course applaud using such methods to arrive at "scientific proofs". In fact, T.C. Chao (Zhao Zichen) long ago sought to separate the Bible and science in order to eliminate such "misunderstandings". He felt that the reason for the conflict between the two was "due to the fact that religion mistakenly treated the Bible as science, thus obliterating true science ... with the result that scientists treated the Bible as a scientific text, but gave up on reading the first chapter of Genesis, saying, this is not science and there's no reason to continue to believe it. For example, to say that the claim that infinite chaos could be done away with in seven days is irrefutable is ridiculous, isn't it?"⁶ Because most of those who held this view were the more liberal "modernists" -- people whose views were quite removed from those of the masses of ordinary Christians who held to the "inspiration theory" -- it was clearly an idea which could not be accepted or understood by most people.

It should be noted that the relative nature and limitations of science have seldom been mentioned in this discussion. Most people have little awareness of the fact that in saying "The Bible is in accord with science" they do not uphold the authority of the Bible, or that this diminishes the Bible's status. Perhaps this is because most people see only the advantages science and technology have brought to humankind, and have not yet noticed the concomitant problems and crises it has produced in contemporary culture. As

modernization progresses, the reflection on human civilization and “scientific truth” that comes with it will cause Chinese Christians to go a step further in their knowledge of biblical truth.

3. The Bible is a Whole

Generally speaking, Westerners are fond of research that involves careful and detailed analysis and this holds true for their research and interpretation of the Bible as well. While studying in Germany, I heard a professor admonish students: “There is no such thing as a theology of the Bible, nor can you make sweeping statements about “what the Bible says...” Thus, one can say that doing critical biblical study (or “bible criticism”) in the West relies on the native skill of the exegete.

Yet exegetes in the Chinese Church are more likely to understand the Bible as a whole. Most evangelists in the Chinese Church see no conflict between the rather dissimilar accounts of creation found in the first and second chapters of Genesis. One exegete put it this way: “The first account is sequential, the second by topic; the first is a wide angle bird’s eye view, the second a close-up shot.”⁷ Exegetes do no find the varying accounts of Jesus’ miracle of the loaves and fishes in the gospels an obstacle either. They feel it “all has to do with loaves and fishes” and “everything is related and forms an organic whole.”⁸

This sort of understanding of the Bible as a unified entity is shaped first of all by the Asian tendency to think holistically, integrating parts into the whole. Secondly, it is of course related to the special characteristics of the faith of the majority of Christians in the Chinese Church. So even those who have been trained in Western theology can find in a comparison of Genesis and Revelation that “the Bible has its own internal system.”⁹

B. Bible Interpretation

With this basic understanding of the Chinese Church’s approach to the Bible, we can proceed with our look at the special features of Bible interpretation in that Church. In terms of transmission and development, the Chinese Church is heir to the traditions of the Reformation and the early Church on the one hand; while on the other, it needs to respond to today’s rapidly changing society.

1. The Aim of Interpretation

The Chinese Church has known tribulations; today it is in an era of revival and rebuilding. We do not yet have a group of experts well versed in the biblical languages and solidly grounded in scholarship, so we lack the qualifications for large-scale exegetical undertakings. Ever since the revival of the church in the early

1980s, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary has compiled the periodical *Correspondence Course*, which often carries serialized commentaries on the books of the Bible. Most of these, however, are not the result of scholarly research, but rather are interpretations of the religious and ethical significance of the text and insights from Bible reading. These commentaries are meant as spiritual training for the mass of lay volunteers in the church. For example: In a commentary on Colossians, one writer passes over the concept of ranks in heaven in Chapter 1 verse 16 -- "...all things in heaven ...whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers" -- emphasizing instead that all things "have been created through him and for him".¹⁰ Another example: not long ago the Chinese Christian Bible publication committee compiled an "Annotated Bible" (NT) but did not provide lists of sources or enumerate various interpretations of the text in its annotations. It too has as its main aim to provide spiritual training for believers and not merely information.

Another important hermeneutical goal in the Chinese Church is to allow God's word to show forth its light in our age. In the matter of how to interpret the practical significance of the biblical text, what exegetes have received appears to be quite varied.

In the 1950s, with the recently established new China before them, some people compared socialism with the beautiful vision of the Bible, and felt that "not only does building socialism not go

against the spirit of the Bible, but it is right in line with it.”¹¹ Today too there are those who attempt to put forward other views than the usual traditional Chinese Christian mindset of absolute opposition between God and the world, belief and unbelief, the word of God and the word of man (sic), and who offer new explanations of related Bible passages, who point out that these are relative in order to adapt to the national situation of stability and unity.¹² Others have a new interpretation of Ecclesiastes’ “All is vanity”, feeling that this is a sigh wrenched from Solomon after leaving God and living a life of corruption and unbounded avarice. They urge Christians today to live active lives of service out of love for God and others.¹³

Another interpretation, a response to the varied forms of evil in today’s society, points out that this sin-stained era is just like “Noah’s times” and that we should rush to urge people into the “ark” -- the Church.¹⁴ There are also some who, in interpreting the significance of the “temple of the Spirit” and the “priestly kingdom”, point out that the Church should not be equated with a secular nation, and any sort of “order” or “head” are cursed by God.¹⁵

As exegetes in the Chinese Church respond to the times, although a minority have some politicized inclinations, the majority act out of an ethical concern for society. In addition, there are those who base an interpretation of natural and social phenomena in the present world on the escatological texts of the gospels and the apocalyptic literature. For example, Wu Mujia feels that Revelation

speaks directly to an age threatened by rampant hegemonism and nuclear destruction.¹⁶

2. Hermeneutical Methods

Though Chinese Christians hold differing views of the Bible and the times, in terms of hermeneutical method, they have more in common than not. The most traditional as well as the most popular exegetical method in the church is the “anagogic method”.

What most people mean by this in most situations is the allegorical method. Examples can be found everywhere. Some people follow a late exegete in giving an allegorical explanation of the three precious metals found over the beautiful gate of the temple: copper means judgement, silver means atonement and gold means glory.¹⁷ And there are those who are extremely original in their interpretation of the “spiritual meaning” of the different types of blemish mentioned in Chapter 21 of Leviticus: a mutilated nose (The NRSV reads ‘face’) means one’s prayers ‘don’t get through’; a limb too long indicates a busybody, etc.¹⁸

I have done some analysis of the reasons for the popularity of the allegorical method of biblical interpretation. The first possibility is that this method has a special affinity for our culture; the second that evangelists in the Chinese Church do not have enough grounding in the history and terminology of hermeneutics.¹⁹

People within the church have already put forward different views of this type of “anagogic method”, on the basis that the “spiritual meaning” and the “allegorical meaning” should be separate. Su Deci states: “The so-called anagogic method follows the spiritual import and lesson of the text, so that both the interpreter and the hearer may receive spiritual help. The anagogic meaning is not at all the same as the allegorical meaning.”²⁰ As knowledge of the languages and literature of the Bible and understanding of the history and geography increases, the trend in hermeneutical methods will be more reasonable, sure and comprehensive.

I have given a preliminary description of the special features of biblical exegesis in the Chinese Church. We find that these are basically features of traditional evangelicalism. At the same time with continuing social development and daily growth of the church these too will move gradually from conservatism to openness. Yet the Bible is the word of God, a unity with Christ at its centre, the highest standard for Christian life. And these constitute the faith of the Chinese Church.

Notes

¹ Jia Yuming. *Shen dao xue*, Lingxiu Academy, 1949, pp.177-179.

² Ibid.

³ Jiang Peifen, *Arise and Go With Me*, Nanjing: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, 1988, pp. 77.

⁴ Gao Yuzong, *Mission of Eternal Life*, Beijing: Yanjing Theological Seminary, 1993, pp. 323-324.

⁵ You Feng, *Know the Truth*, p. 136.

⁶ T.C. Chao, *Christian Philosophy*, Chinese Christian Literature Society, pp. 78-79.

⁷ Yi Ming in *Collected Sermons*, no. 34 (1996), pp. 104.

⁸ Gao, pp. 4.

⁹ K.H. Ting, *How to Study the Bible*, Shanghai: Chinese Christian Council, 1983, p. 5.

¹⁰ Han Bide, *A New Commentary on* Nanjing: Nanjing

Union Theological Seminary, 1991, p. 3.

¹¹ Chen Shuqian, "Christians and Reality", in *Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 6 (1957).

¹² Pan Jinggao, "Looking at Three Questions through the Experiences of the Prophets", *Collected Sermons*, no. 6 (1983), p. 109.

¹³ Shi Shouling, "The Meaning of 'All is vanity'", *Collected Sermons*, no. 5 (1983), p. 109.

¹⁴ Jing Jiuwei, "Builder of the Ark, the Just Man Noah", *Collected Sermons*, no. 28 (1994), pp. 74-80.

¹⁵ Sun Hanshu, "Thoughts on the Doctrines and Lessons of First Peter", *Collected Sermons*, no. 32 (1995), pp. 111-117.

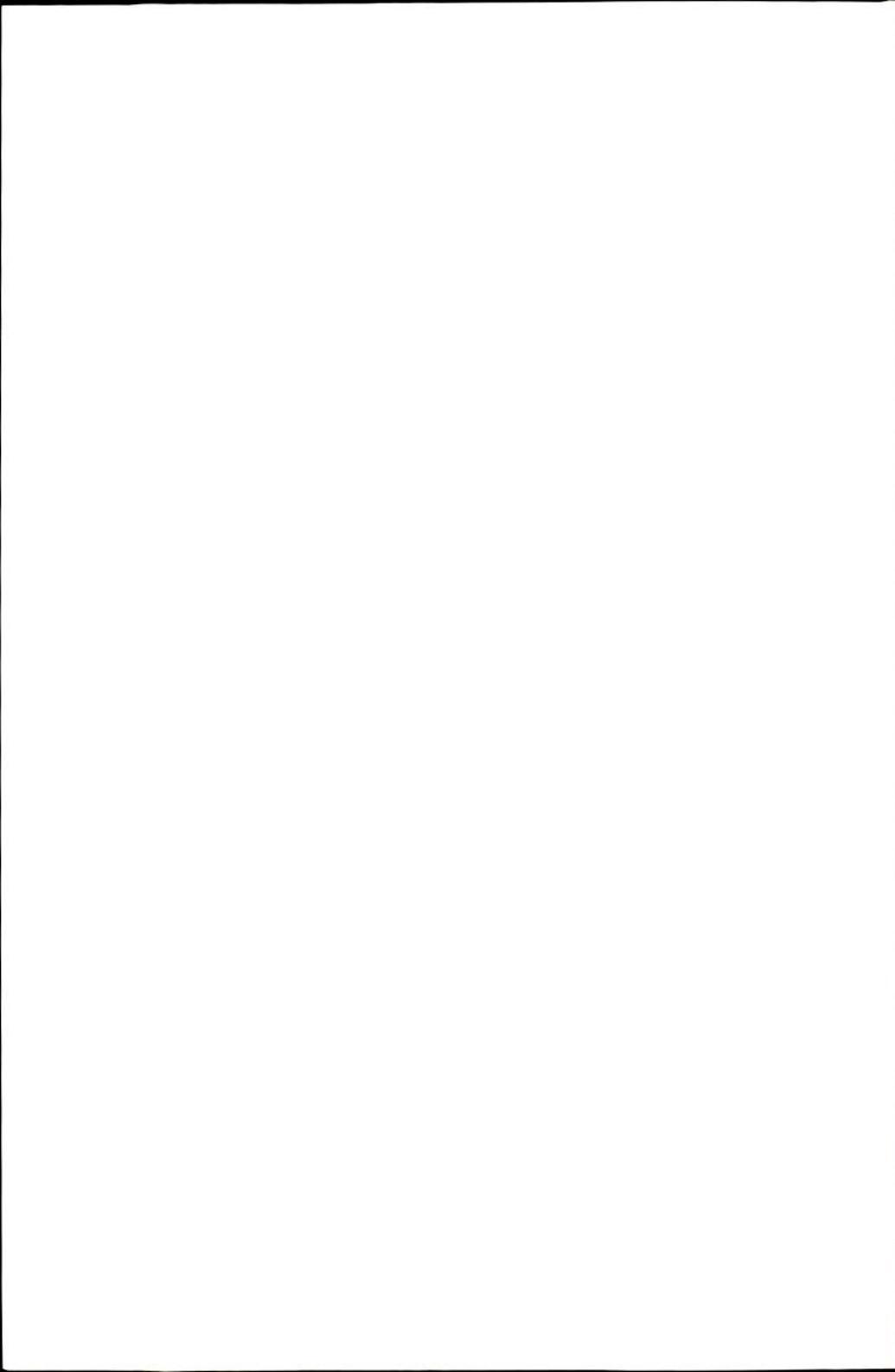
¹⁶ Wu Mujia, *A Commentary on Revelation*, Nanjing: Chinese Christian Commission on Theological Education, 1994, p. 2.

¹⁷ Qi Qingcai, "Spiritual Lessons of the Gate of Beauty", *Collected Sermons*, no. 2 (1981), pp. 29-30.

¹⁸ Gao, p. 309.

¹⁹ Ji Tai, "Preaching in the Church in China", *Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 26 (1996), p. 10. English translation in *Chinese Theological Review*: 11:1 (1996), pp. 21-30.

²⁰ Su Deci, *Primer of Biblical Research*, Nanjing: Chinese Christian Commission on Theological Education, 1993, 2nd ed., p. 118.



Response

**Dr. Nicholas H. F. Tai
Professor, Lutheran Theological Seminary,
Hong Kong**

The presentation of Rev. Ji Tai is mainly descriptive. Rev. Ji has presented a very concise but at the same time a very clear picture of the understanding of the Bible among Chinese Christians. The personal understanding of the Bible determines the principles of hermeneutics.

Rev. Ji pointed out correctly, that Chinese Christians hold a view of verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible to such an extreme that the Chinese translation could not be changed. Although Rev. Ji has also pointed out that this kind of understanding of the Bible becomes more and more open to different translations of the Bible, it is anyhow a minority. The influence of the writings of the great revival speakers of the twenties to the fifties are still dominant in China as well as in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In ‘the Bible and Science’ I think Rev Ji’s observation is right: “The Bible is scientific” is somehow very important for the Chinese Christian. I think this is a missiological and apologetical way of thinking. People who hold this view just want to differentiate themselves from the other religions, which they label as superstitious. “The Bible is scientific” reflects sometimes the superstition of science from the side of the Christian. Even the famous interpreter of the Bible, Stephen C. T. Chan, could not avoid this kind of superstition.¹ Rev. Ji pointed out that science and technology seem to contribute a lot to modern society. We have just overlooked the danger it brings. The relevance of the Bible I think is not to

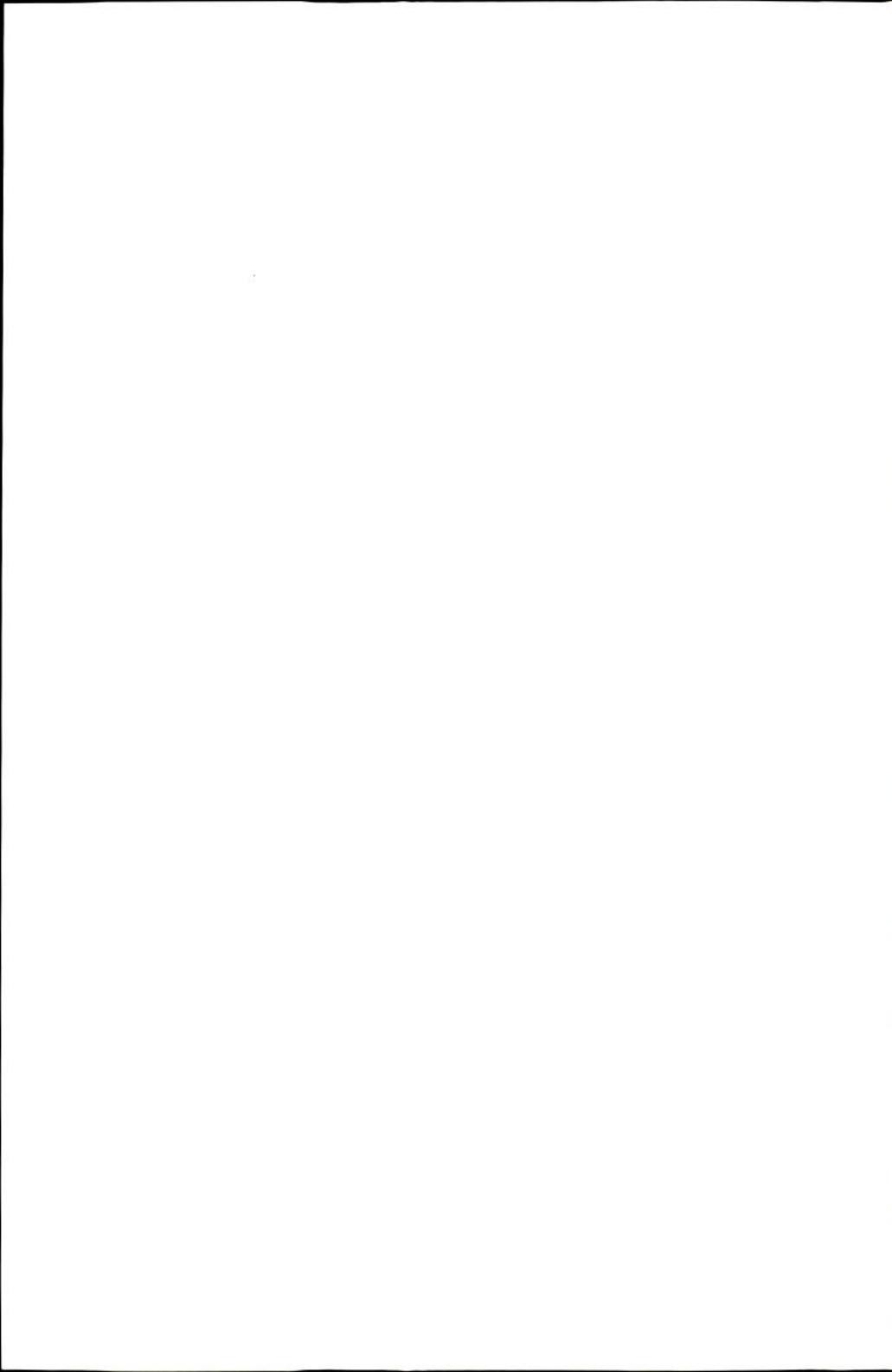
contribute to science and technology (like the medieval Catholic Church), but to an age which believes in the almighty power of science and technology.

After dealing with the essentials Rev. Ji turns to the goal of interpretation. He states that the purpose of interpretation is Christian nurture and spiritual growth. The interpreting method which is widely used is called 'Spiritual Interpretation'. He made a distinction between the 'Spiritual Interpretation' and 'Allegory'. This topic will be presented in the next section by Dr. Leung. One point that we should not overlook is the moral implications of the biblical interpretation among Chinese Christians.

Note

¹ Stephen C. T. Chan in his “How to study the Bible” p.14 clearly stated Isa 40:22 and Prov 8:27 tell us the earth is round. Therefore, the Bible is scientific. The word for ‘round’ in Hebrew is **וּבָרָךְ** (chugh) and means ‘inside of a circle’ see K. Seybold, **וּבָרָךְ** (chugh) Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. IV pp.244-247.

Section Two



**A Defense For Spiritual Interpretation of
the Chinese Church**

**Written by Dr. Ka-Lun Leung
Professor, Alliance Bible Seminary
Hong Kong**

Translated by Dr. Wai-Shing Chau

I. Introduction: Criticism on Spiritual Interpretation

The Chinese evangelical churches have experienced significant progress in the past three decades. This can be particularly seen in the emergence of a new generation of Christians in Taiwan and Hong Kong, many of whom have received higher degrees from local and overseas seminaries, and are serving in key positions in congregations or seminaries. They have caught the express train of the Euro-American evangelical churches that have begun since the fifties, and are gradually getting loose from the fetters of fundamentalism to the recognition of the theological thought of mainstream evangelicalism. They are eager to erase the image of narrowness, ignorance and obscurantism of traditional fundamentalism, and present to the world with the face of open-mindedness, informed rationality and open attitude of modern evangelicalism. This marks an important step in historical development, signifying the transformation of the church over time. And we may foresee (or we have already seen) that, with the increase in membership, the evangelical churches will replace the mainline churches and evangelical scholars will occupy the main theological lecterns and become the main spokespersons for contemporary Christianity.

Hoping to get rid of the negative images of fundamentalism and to acknowledge the orthodoxy of evangelical theology, Chinese

evangelical scholars have rendered a great deal of criticism upon traditional fundamentalism, some of which is even harsher than those given by the liberals, as if they were not coming from the tradition of fundamentalism, or as if they wanted to discard more from fundamentalism than what they have inherited. In the area of hermeneutics, the most disgusting aspect of fundamentalism to the evangelicals is the wide adoption of spiritual interpretation. When Lam Wing Hung reviews several important figures of the Chinese church in the 20th century, he criticizes the danger of their methods of spiritual interpretation. His direct criticism of Watchman Nee is this:

It was out of good intention that Nee advocated the method of “reading the Scriptures with the spirit”, emphasizing the development of life... But his advocacy can be dangerous in stressing the spiritual sense more than the literal sense. Personal ideas can then easily slip in, making it difficult to distinguish between “illuminations” and “personal ideas”.¹

And his indirect criticism upon Wang Ming-dao is like this:

Under spiritual interpretation, events and things of the Scriptures become symbols of certain spiritual truths, and hence lose the meanings they represented in their particular times and places. Literal meaning becomes secondary, while the ethical and spiritual meanings become the most important. Spiritual interpretation has its fascination, but strictly speaking it is very dangerous, because it does not have a rigid system or regulation, and is too often linked to the imagination of the readers, thus easily creating theological confusion. It was in vogue for a long time in the medieval church, stripping many theological doctrines of their Scriptural basis.²

Lam's criticism of Nee is basically appropriate, but his appraisal of Wang deserves second thought. Strictly speaking,

Wang is not a spiritualist. He treasures very much the literal sense of the Scriptures, emphasizing that the purpose of exegesis is to discover the original meaning of the Scriptural writers.³ The only place where he may be suspected of spiritual interpretation is his adoption of typology in exegeting the Old Testament. In the author's shallow understanding, this is a way of "Christianizing" the Old Testament, the main, if not the only, way of making the Old Testament relevant, effective and practical in the contemporary Christian church. We may not agree with some of the typological interpretations of Wang, but it is obviously an exaggeration to say that they are dangerous and causing theological confusion, or to relate them to the abusive Scriptural interpretation of the Middle Ages. I believe Lam, after reading through the writings of Wang, can be sure that a fundamentalist like Wang is actually not, and even theoretically cannot be, a heretic. His typological interpretation might have misinterpreted several passages, but can certainly not create erroneous doctrines. (More will be said about this methodological "cannot".) Lam judges Wang to be an allegorist as soon as he finds him using spiritual interpretations, and quickly relates this to the radical allegories in church history. But he has not carefully found out the real meaning of this so-called "spiritual interpretation", and has not discerned the great difference between the spiritual interpretation of Chinese scholars and pastors, and the allegorical interpretation of the Western medieval mystics.

Anyway, Lam's critique reveals that spiritual interpretation as a whole in the eyes of evangelical scholars is not only primitive, non-academic and irrational, but also erroneous and dangerous.

The author believes our present criticisms upon spiritual interpretation are inaccurate and unfair. If the purpose of these criticisms is for the Chinese evangelical scholars to define their own position in the Western theological spectrum and to have a reference point for their present endeavor, such as the affirmation of the grammatical-historical hermeneutics as the mainline hermeneutics of the evangelicals, I solemnly express my respect and honor. But for the sake of pure academic historical study, the author has to point out that many of these criticisms are not historical. They have not shown the characteristics of spiritual interpretation of the Chinese church, and are unfair to the historical figures concerned.

II. Significance of Spiritual Interpretation

1. What is Spiritual Interpretation?

a. Definition

What is spiritual interpretation?

It is a Scriptural exegetical method in contrast to literal interpretation, and more correctly it should be called allegorical interpretation. It is first of all a belief that the meaning of a text is beyond that of its words. As an exegetical method, it is a way to probe into the hidden or deeper meaning of a text.⁴

Allegorical interpretation has a long tradition, and has been widely existing in nearly all cultures where words are more skillfully used. This is because allegory is a commonly employed literary technique transforming linguistic symbols into metaphors, bestowing on them meanings beyond the original superficial sense, so as to convey more richly and more fully the writers' ideas. Since there is no direct linear relationship and mechanical correspondence between symbols and meanings, no dictionary can exhaust the meaning of a symbol. This literary technique is most suitable for expressing creative, inspiring and imaginative contents, such as those in literature and religion, because the unidirectional and close meaning of words cannot express the multi-faceted and open ideas

and feelings of the writers. That is why allegories have to be employed. As many literature and religious writings are written in allegories, naturally they have to be interpreted allegorically.⁵

b. The Appropriateness of Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical interpretation is created because of the existence of allegorical writing. So the appropriateness of this method depends on whether the writings to which it is applied is allegorical in nature. If a writing is written in allegorical literary style, it cannot be interpreted according to the literal sense, otherwise the author's intention can never be understood. But if it is not written in allegories, allegorical interpretation can lead to misunderstandings.⁶ So it is meaningless to discuss in isolation and in general whether allegorical interpretation is good or bad, or whether allegorical interpretation is better than literal interpretation. The key question is whether the Scriptures are allegorical writings.

The author believes no one can deny that the Scriptures as religious writings contain numerous allegorical presentations, such as the allegories and parables of Jesus in explaining his marvelous ideas, the typologies linking the New Testament with the Old Testament teachings, and the symbolic descriptions or visions prophesying about events beyond the comprehension of the present age. All these literary forms cannot be correctly or fully explained with literal interpretation. As the keen defender of allegorical

interpretation Tsang Lam-fong says, it is wrong to attack allegorical interpretation “because it is attacking the Bible itself”, for this was the method commonly employed by the Scriptural writers.⁷ What should be discussed here is: whether the Bible is completely written in allegory? Whether allegorical interpretation is appropriate to all Scriptural texts?

Therefore we should not criticize beforehand allegorical or spiritual interpretation in general or simply take it as contradictory to the grammatical-historical interpretation advocated by the evangelicals, as if these two are mutually exclusive. Actually the spirit of the grammatical-historical method is to allow the literary style of the texts to decide the methods of interpretation. So it is basically not excluding allegorical interpretation. The facts that the sixteenth century reformers criticized allegorical method severely and that the twentieth century Chinese evangelical theologians dismiss spiritual interpretation are actually against the abuses of this method as employed by the medieval Catholic church and the fundamentalistic pastors in the early twentieth century. They were against the fruits of interpretation, and not the method itself. There is certainly an intrinsic danger in allegorical interpretation, as there are defects and potential dangers in every method. But corrections need not be overdone. What should be discussed is how to limit its use, and not to reject it arbitrarily as a whole.

What percentage of the Scriptures are allegorical in nature and appropriate to apply the allegorical method is too big and technical a question for this paper to handle. The author is not a biblical scholar, and considers himself incompetent to handle this question. Here I only intend to focus on the phenomenon of spiritual interpretation in the Chinese church, and to study the belief and presuppositions about the Scriptures of the spiritual interpreters which lay behind their application of the method. The issue here is thus the question of the understanding of the Scriptures behind the hermeneutical method, and is a systematic question instead of a hermeneutical one.

Most of the spiritual interpreters of the Chinese church believe that a majority (or the entirety) of the Scriptures contain meanings beyond the literal sense, and that the primary task of exegesis (to which preaching is inseparable) is to discover and explicate the hidden meanings of the texts. So some refer to this method as figurism, i.e., probing for the hidden sense of the text. The spiritual interpreters believe that if the literal sense is not entirely unimportant, it is not the only meaning of the text. There is underneath this literal sense a hidden meaning which the author really wanted to convey and expected the readers to grasp. In other words, a text may have only one meaning, which is the deep-lying meaning behind the words, or it may have several layers of meaning, both the literal sense and the deeper meaning have their own

significance. If the reader cannot penetrate through the superficial meaning of the words into the hidden meaning of the text intended by the writer, the text has not yet been correctly or fully understood.

Some like John Sung may even radically believe that the intended meaning does not have any direct correspondence with the words. The words are simply a set of codes conveying hidden meanings unrelated to the literal sense. Thus exegesis is a decoding exercise, restoring the codes to a language different from the original words. This is the same as Jesus speaking to the people only in parables, not allowing them to receive directly the mystery of the heavenly kingdom (Mat. 13:10-16). The spiritual teachings of God can only be comprehended by spiritual people.

The spiritual interpreters stress the divine nature of the Scriptures, believing God the Holy Spirit to be its chief, if not its only, author, verbally inspiring the human writers of the texts. Therefore the deep-lying meaning is the hidden sense implied by the Holy Spirit, to be contemplated by readers, and is thus called the “spiritual sense”. Chan Tsai-man considers the term “spiritual interpretation” to reflect a Chinese indigenized version of the western allegorical method.⁸ What concerns the Chinese is not the literary forms and interpretation method, but the divine origin of the message, which is the only foundation of truth and authority.

2. Why Should Spiritual Interpretation be Used?

a. “Christianization” of the Old Testament

Moises Silva has made the following appraisal of the allegorical interpretation of the early church:

We have to admit that Origen and many of his early or medieval followers over-emphasized the divine nature of the Scriptures and ignored that there is also a human stratum (which is also the historical part) in the text. This inclination led to numerous abuses, including the full development of allegorical method. This method pursues after the divine sense behind the human words.⁹

This appraisal is unfair, for it has abstracted the figures from their historical backgrounds. But it has at least pointed out an important fact that the allegorists were intending to defend the divine nature of the Scriptures, not allowing the “human stratum” to distort its inner truth. This is also the historical reason for the appearance of allegorical interpretation.

Allegorical interpretation has a long Jewish tradition, and can be traced at least to the second century or even earlier in Christian history. This method has been widely used by the church fathers to resolve the relationship between the Old Testament and the Christian faith, i.e., the problem of apostolic continuity with the Old Testament. Marcionites and other heretics of the second century insisted on literal interpretation, and hence concluded that the God preached by Jesus and the apostles was different from that of the Old

Testament. So the church fathers were eager to prove that the Old Testament teachings were consistent with the apostolic preaching, otherwise the Old Testament could no longer be the Christian Scriptures. They believed through correct interpretation of the Old Testament the pre-figured Jesus Christ and His gospel could naturally be seen, and this correct interpretation was the allegorical interpretation. As Jaroslav Pelikan said, the defense of the church fathers for the Old Testament presupposes the appropriateness of spiritual interpretation as the way to discover the deep-lying meaning of the Old Testament.¹⁰

Besides, the church fathers had to limit the function of the Old Testament so as to distinguish Christianity from Judaism. They interpreted the decalogue literally, acknowledging its applicability to Christians as well. But they had to reject at the same time the ritual codes, denying the effectiveness of such regulations as circumcision and restrictions on food. They naturally followed Paul in using allegorical methods (as in Galatians) to annul the literal meaning of these rules, which is the best way to Christianize the Jewish Scriptures.¹¹ What the later church fathers did was only to expand Paul's method to include the New Testament, thus integrating the Scriptures and Christian living.

So the motivation of the early church fathers in using allegorical interpretation is mainly apologetic, defending the Christian truth against heresies. They were not intending to create

new heresies through allegorical interpretation, or to advocate personal freedom in Scriptural interpretation and to construct their own versions of Christian faith. On the contrary, they were defending the traditional faith transmitted from the apostles, and to eliminate the superficial conflict between the tradition and the Biblical narratives through the application of allegorical interpretation. Thus the purpose of allegorical interpretation is to defend the old teaching and not to create new teachings. Even though this method has the danger of producing erroneous teachings, that was not its original intention. Origen said, it would even be easier to produce heresies if allegorical interpretation had not been used.¹² The paradoxical truth of this saying can only be understood in the historical context of the early church.

b. Not Ruleless Free Interpretation

Of course, if allegorists advocate that the Scriptures can be interpreted without any objective regulation, they have to face the fact that this method is a two-edged sword. They can use it to defend traditional faith; others can also use the same method to defend heresies or to create new heresies. In this way, the Scriptural evidence they use to establish certain doctrines through allegorical interpretation can easily be denied. How can words be accepted as truth if they depend on the speaker? If one takes what one says as authoritative, there will be no distinction between orthodoxy and heresies. Is it really true, as is said in some post-

modern theories, that “orthodoxy” is only dictated by power?

It can be observed by detailed scrutiny of the thinking of early church fathers that none of the orthodox church fathers thought the Scriptures could be freely interpreted. They might stress that bishops and the teaching offices of the church were the agent of truth, and that only their Scriptural interpretation was correct and only they were capable of discovering the spiritual sense behind the text.¹³ Or they might advocate that allegorical interpretation should be restricted by the rules of faith and certain methodology, and free interpretation was not allowed. Prominent figures of allegorical interpretation, Clement and Origen for example, distinguished clearly their method with that of the Gnostics. Of course they considered theirs to be correct, while that of the Gnostics erroneous. Origen judged the Gnostic interpretation to be fragmentary, spiritually interpreting only certain favorite passages arbitrarily selected. He thought the correct method of interpretation must take the entire Scriptures as an integrity, and viewing individual passages from the perspective of the entirety. In this way he was not much different from the spiritual interpretation of later ages in taking “theological exegesis” and “interpreting Scriptures with Scriptures” as the guiding principles. Besides, Origen, like other church fathers, had not objected to literal interpretation as the basic exegetical method; he interpreted many passages in the literal sense.¹⁴ He only considered it insufficient to have the literal sense

alone, and had to supplement it with allegorical interpretation. In his view, there were three levels of meanings in the Scriptures, corresponding to the body, soul and spirit of a human. The literal sense is the body and a true meaning of the Bible, and is understandable by the majority. But only the very few Christian gnostics can discover the deeper spiritual meaning beyond the literal sense.

We will discuss below that there is basically also a strong apologetic inclination among contemporary Chinese spiritual interpreters. Their intention is not in creating novel truths through spiritual interpretation, but in acknowledging that the purpose of God in inspiring the Scriptures is the defense of the traditional faith, not allowing anyone to threaten or to deny the faith by anything claimed to be fruits of exegesis.

Besides defending the orthodoxy of the traditional faith, spiritual interpreters are also concerned about the pragmatic nature of the Scriptures. They assume that Scripture reading is not for the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity, but for the leading of a life in accordance with the will of God. This idea comes directly from the tradition of the reformers like John Calvin.¹⁵ The spiritual interpreters believe there is at least one spiritual teaching in every text helping believers to lead a pious life. In order to find out the relevance of Scriptures to the present days and to fuse the horizons of the text and the readers, they adopt allegorical interpretation and

treat every passage as a parable or an allegory, looking for types and similitudes across time and space, thus establishing the relevance of the Scriptures.

3. Spiritual Interpretation and Chinese Tradition

a. Chinese “Exegetical” Tradition

The method of searching for hidden meanings has a long history in China. Besides recognizing the supreme authority of classical texts, the Chinese thinking and writing have been for a long time following the format and content as set out by the classics. Hence arise the various types of writings such as classics, discourses, commentaries and exegetical writings. The Four Books and the Five Classics of Confucianism have been studied over and over thousands of times in the past two thousand years, but that does not mean that all the writings and thinking patterns of these classical scholars are traditional, conservative, monotonous and non-creative. In fact, “in addition to commentaries and exegetic writings, studies of classical texts can also take the form of biographies, discussions and descriptions. These three forms were widely practiced in the West-Han Period, and had not hindered people’s mental creativity.”¹⁶ The exegetes could transcend the restrictions of the text and maintained their intellectual independence in exercising freedom in creation.

The Gong-yang school can be said to have set the tradition of Chinese spiritual interpretation. Ever since the Han dynasty, this school advocated that Confucius had used very condensed words in his compilation of the Book of Spring-Autumn, but had conducted orally its implications to his disciples. These were then transmitted from Zi-xia to Hu-mu-zi-du, who had written the Book of Gong-yang. The Gong-yang school was founded on this book and is also referred to as the Modern-text school. Their stress was not on word studies, but on the implications of the texts. They particularly believed that Confucius had expressed his political ideals and historical philosophy in his Book of Spring-Autumn, and had given guidance for later generations over political systems and personal management. Thus the purpose of their exegesis was not the literal meaning of the texts, but the discovery of the implications underneath the words. Of course this school did not think it appropriate for people to utter words without basis and to hang every novel idea onto the words, making arbitrary interpretations. Their purpose was mainly practical, employing the tradition for modern use, looking for theoretical bases for contemporary revolutionary political actions through exegesis of classical texts. Gong-yang studies was an important intellectual weapon for political reformers in the Qing dynasty.¹⁷

Besides being used to rationalize modern actions through exegeting ancient classics, the method of searching for hidden

meanings was also often used for cultural comparison, reducing the foreign-ness of alien cultures to facilitate their understanding by the Chinese people. This is the theory of “Western studies originated from China”, claiming that every strange thing in fact had already been mentioned in the classics, and that they were neither novel nor anti-traditional. Advocators of this theory endeavored to discover in the classics similitudes to Western things, which is another form of looking for implications. They also searched in the ancient texts support for their reform, and this is “exploiting the ancient for the purpose of reform”.¹⁸

b. Chinese Exegesis of Religious Classics

It has to be pointed out particularly that Chinese tradition holds a reverencing and mystical attitude toward religious texts, considering them to be divine oracles, not to be interpreted in ways common to human writings. Rational analysis is not important, but mystical awareness is the key to understanding. The folk *lien-shu* for example, is claimed to have revealed hidden mysteries of heaven, and is the most valuable mystic text, capable of getting rid of all kinds of evils and answering all sorts of questions on earth.¹⁹ The answers are arrived at through means similar to artistic intuition, i.e., treating the text as purely codes, and comparing with the present events through analogical thinking, discovering similarities between them and thus “proving” that the present situation has been predicted in the mystical texts.²⁰ And then through some cue

words (which are also found in parables and allegories), the preconception of people is strengthened, so that human ideas are elevated to the position of divine inspiration, lending faith to their own ideas. It also helps people to choose among possibilities, thus reducing their anxiety in the process of decision. Anyway, the divinity of a religious text will be doubted if it does not have the ability to predict the future and the practicability to give guidance in decision. Unlike historical or philosophical writings, religious texts must possess a deeper mystical meaning, and the literal sense is relatively unimportant.

In Chinese church history, the method of searching for hidden meanings had been employed by missionaries and Chinese converts upon Chinese classics as early as the late Ming dynasty. Believing there was general revelation of God hidden in the Chinese ancient texts which were not in conflict with Christian teachings, they endeavored to harmonize Chinese tradition with the Christian Scriptures. From late Qing until the present time, this method has often been used in the Chinese church by those working for cultural indigenization.²¹

The author believes the wide adoption of spiritual interpretation in the Chinese church is closely related to the long tradition of the method of searching for hidden meanings in classical texts. The Chinese have the inclination to worship sages and classical texts. They believe sages are divinely-gifted persons

capable of understanding the will of heaven and natural orders, knowing both the past and future for their wisdom transcends history, and able to set the laws with foresight for the ages to come. The Chinese also believe the holy classics are normative everywhere and authoritative in all ages, eternally effective and applicable beyond the limitation of time and space.²² With this emphasis on the eternity and universality of sages and classics, historical particularities are ignored, only to be considered as primitive and minor in classical literary analysis and historical studies. Furthermore, the Chinese character of caring for this - worldly and practical issues and the emphasis on the utility of knowledge force the Chinese to be impatient with purely technical structural analysis of sentences, but to prefer studying for the sake of correcting abuses and saving the people. The criteria for the appropriateness of studying classics and the thoroughness of comprehension of texts are the practicability and relevance of such a study. Accuracy of understanding is closely related to its relevance and application to the present time. Studying classics without utility is considered to be rotten. In Christian terms, intellectual knowledge without praxis cannot be called an understanding of the Scriptures.

III. Spiritual Interpretation and Free Interpretation

1. Does Spiritual Interpretation Not have any Rules?

The first mistaken judgment upon spiritual interpretation is that it is a free interpretation without the restriction of any serious hermeneutical principles. It has been mentioned above that Lam Wing-hung discusses the dangers of Wang Ming-dao in applying the method of spiritual interpretation.

Spiritual interpretation has its fascination, but strictly speaking it is very dangerous, because it does not have a rigid system or regulation, and is too often linked to the imagination of the readers, thus easily creating theological confusion.²³

Apparently spiritual interpretation is indeed quite free, without any regulations to observe. There is no need to do word and sentence structure analysis, nor to consider the historical context of the text. There is even no need to follow or criticize previous studies, not to mention referring to exegetical tools. The texts are simply interpreted off-hand arbitrarily, and indeed very freely.

The author does not deny that there are some care-free spiritual interpreters and that some heresies borrow the cue of spiritual interpretation to create novelties out of their minds. But this is not the whole truth. The great majority of Chinese “spiritual interpretation” theologians in recent years, such as Wang Ming-dao, Watchman Nee, John Sung, Jia Yu-ming etc., are well-

acknowledged conservatives. Their ideas may not be entirely correct, but it is incredible to claim that they advocate free interpretation.

In fact the major criticism of Wang Ming-dao upon liberal theology (which he called afideism) is that it misinterpreted the Scriptures according to human imagination.²⁴ He often rebukes new theologies for their violation of Biblical teachings, and usually deploys without footnotes a bulk of Biblical texts as his support.²⁵ How can he then advocate personal imagination in Scriptural interpretation? As he sees it, spiritual interpretation is not arbitrary or without rules, (though it still needs further study to examine if this is objectively so).

The great majority of Chinese spiritual interpreters are disciplined exegetes, observing a system of strict hermeneutical principles. These principles may differ in minor details, but are basically similar, namely, Christocentric theological interpretation and interpreting the Scriptures with the Scriptures, recognizing the unanimity of the entire Bible. These two principles are intimately related to spiritual interpretation.

2. Theological Interpretation

We may say that in theory spiritual interpretation can cause the danger of theological confusion, but in practice it is quite safe,

even safer than the so-called grammatical-historical interpretation. This is because a very important aspect of spiritual interpretation is theological interpretation, using certain theological systems as the guideline of interpretation. To Chinese fundamentalist scholars, this theological system is the orthodox doctrines of fundamentalistic faith. Spiritual interpreters demand Biblical exegesis to be in line with orthodox fundamentalistic faith, so the result is already decided before exegesis. There cannot be said to be any risk in exegesis; exegetes are not even given any freedom of movement.

Fundamentalist scholars became well aware after centuries of challenges to faith by Euro-American higher criticism that the Bible is not self-explanatory. It can only be understood when correctly exegeted, and the key is in the presuppositions and method of exegesis. Do we honor the Bible as the Word of God and His revelation toward humans, or regard it as ancient religious writings of a Near-Eastern tribe, purely a record of the concept of God and religious experience of an ancient people? With what presuppositions do we analyze it? If it is believed right from the beginning as a medley of ideas copied here and there, all apparently inconsistent records will be exaggerated, claiming to have found more than two hundred different traditions. If the Holy Spirit is believed to be the common author behind the scores of writers of the sixty-six books, connections can be found in all cases of divergence, and harmony instead of dismemberment will be achieved²⁶ ... In

short, our doctrine of the Scriptures will determine the method and results of our exegesis. There is no “theologically objective” exegesis. Theology and methodology come before and determine exegesis.

a. Christocentric Exegesis

Spiritual interpreters do not allow the freedom of movement demanded by the free interpreters of the Scriptures, forbidding them to turn exegesis into a totally independent and purely technical subject beyond the authority of the church and traditional doctrines. The Bible is to the spiritual interpreters not just a collection of ancient literary productions or some personal religious texts, but the Scriptures of the Christian church, publicly recognized by the church for two thousand years, the eternal teachings of the living God. Christians are not Judaists, and the majority are not religious scholars, so they do not have any academic interest (not even curiosity!) about purely Judaic texts and near-eastern culture. The Old Testament to them is only the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, and not the Torah and Writings of the Jews. As Christian texts, the Old Testament must have its central theme governed by Jesus Christ. Only in the light of Jesus Christ, the highest and fullest inspiration of God, can it be fully understood. Since Christianity is entirely Christocentric, the Old Testament must also be Christocentric. We can accept a process of progressive inspiration, i.e., the Old Testament writers and readers might not

have the Christian faith in their minds as we do today, but being part of the inspiration and redemption plan of God, the Old Testament must point toward the New Testament and Christ as recorded in the latter. There cannot be divergence and contradiction between the two. From the perspective of the church and faith (not “purely academic”), the Old Testament is an appendix of the New, and our Bible is called the New-Old Testaments, not the other way round. The order of naming is crucial.²⁷

Wang Ming-dao is not a spiritual interpreter. But he stresses the practical function of the Bible and believes the purpose of studying the Scriptures is not to have an intellectual understanding of some ancient near-eastern religious texts, but to give directions to the church and guidance to believers to lead a God-pleasing life. So he uses a lot of spiritual interpretation in exegeting the Old Testament, so as to arrive at spiritual teachings that span the spatial and temporal gap between the Old Testament and the contemporary church. To quote an example, Wang believes the theme of the story of Gideon is to teach believers how to rectify the church for the fulfillment of God’s blessed ministry. So every person and event in the story is typological:

Gideon:	someone called by God
Israelites:	the church
worship Baal:	pursuit after money, power, knowledge and fame
breaking the altar:	cleansing the church
horn:	the word of God

- empty bottles: the body of believers
- torch: the Holy Spirit
- breaking bottles: not fearing injury in the warfare for God, so that the power of the Holy Spirit can be manifested²⁸

Typological interpretation is to have the Old Testament pointing toward the New as well to the contemporary Christian church. It presupposes the relevance of Old Testament to the church, thus ensuring its suitability to the present age as well as its applicability to Christian living. (Translator's note: "New - Old Testaments" is one of the Chinese names for the whole Christian Bible.)

Jia Yu-ming uses typology a lot to interpret the Old Testament. He believes the entire Scriptures is in every detail inspired by God, and every jot and dot is inerrant and full of divine mystery. So we should not only pay attention to the content of the passages when reading, nor only to the doctrines and moral teachings of the author, but also to every minor name of person, name of place, number, and to the plot and detailed plan of the story, because in them are hidden special divine inspirations. He has not explicitly given us clues as to the way of discovering these special divine inspirations, but we can correctly grasp his method in his spiritual interpretations. First of all he hooks up the entire Old Testament with Jesus Christ, believing every passage to be a type of his life and teachings. Then he diligently compares the Old Testament accounts with the Gospels, watching for common points and similarities between both. The

spiritual sense of the Old Testament is thus determined. (See appendix 1) Thus the life and teachings of Jesus (that is the Gospels) are the goal that he wants to arrive at and the spiritual sense the text should have. No matter how forced is his work of harmonizing the Old Testament with the Gospels, and how incredible is the process of integrating two different sets of ideas, his results are never surprising. We shall never worry that spiritual interpretation will bring the text into unknown territory, because Chinese spiritual interpreters like Jia Yu-ming are never lost or without direction. They twist the Scriptures to fit the Old Testament to Jesus Christ. The process may be arbitrary, but the results are not. So it is impossible to give rise to heresies.

Spiritual interpreters point out that not every book or every passage of the New Testament is equally important. There is a canon within the canon, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the center of the Bible and Christian faith. As Yang Shao-tang says, the entire Scriptures give witness to Christ. Even the headings of every book of the Scriptures has this function, bringing out the different aspects of Christ for a full understanding of Him. He says, for example, that Genesis is to show that Christ is the seed of a woman, Exodus that Christ is the slain lamb, Leviticus that Christ is the high priest, etc. He says, "Reading the Scriptures for ordinary teachings only but not for the witnessing of Christ is not getting at the goodness of the Scriptures. Only in finding the theme of each

book and the brilliance of Christ can the original purpose of Scriptural writing be achieved.”²⁹ Watchman Nee declares, the Word of God is both a book (the Bible) and Jesus Christ. So in Scriptural reading, we should not only understand this book, but to “bring out Christ” from it.³⁰

Jia Yu-ming has also bluntly pointed out,

The central idea of the whole Bible is the grace of salvation, the perfect way of saving prepared by God for humanity. Its center is Jesus Christ, and its theme is the cross. The cross is the summary of the entire Old Testament, and the origin of the New Testament. Jesus’ shadow can be seen in every book, every chapter, every page of the Bible. And the entire Bible is talking about nothing but the birth, the death, the resurrection, the exaltation and the parousia of Jesus, as well as all the fruits of his life, death, resurrection, ascension and parousia.³¹

To John Sung, the central message of Christianity is summed up in the following themes: sin of humanity, love of God the Father, the holy blood of the cross, repentance and rebirth, filling with the Holy Spirit, witnessing for the Lord, running on the spiritual path, waiting for the coming of the Lord. The entire Bible is talking about these themes, and his sermons have never gone beyond these themes.³² As an example, he believes the purpose of Exodus is to illustrate metaphorically the gospel message of Jesus redeeming His people:

Egypt represents the world, and Israelites in Egypt represent those so-called Christians who are not yet reborn. (Many children of pastors and deacons are not zealous and are not yet reborn. They are only Christians in name.) Pharaoh

represents the devil. Exodus means coming out from sin. Moses represents Jesus who redeems his children from sin.³³

This Christocentric hermeneutical principle of the spiritual interpreters is totally consistent with the ideas of the reformers. The latter insisted that the Old Testament was witnessing to the hidden Christ, while the New Testament was witnessing to the revealed Christ.³⁴

b. Concern of Theological Correctness

Accusing the charismatics of distorting the Scriptures to rationalize their erroneous ideas, Wang Ming-dao points out, "It is very good to believe firmly in the Scriptures, but it is a great danger if those who believe in the Bible have it misinterpreted."³⁵

As the Chinese spiritual interpreters are theologically conservative fundamentalists, their hermeneutics follows the orthodox metaphysical-deductive approach, and they reject the empirical-inductive approach demanded by most Biblical scholars nowadays, including the evangelicals. They emphasize Scriptures alone, but disagree that Scriptures can be freely interpreted without restraints, and do not believe one can study the Scriptures with a theologically objective stand. (They have discovered this fact much earlier than post-modern hermeneutics!) Those who hold an erroneous doctrine of the Bible and erroneous theological thoughts will inevitably produce erroneous exegesis, despite their claim that they are totally objective and allow the Scriptures to speak without

prejudice. The starting point of faith is faith. There is no purely objective stand, and there is no thoroughly inductive method.

Watchman Nee has nicely illustrated this in distinguishing between knowing Christ and understanding the Scriptures. He points out that one has to know Christ first in order to understand the Scriptures correctly. “Those who know Christ will naturally understand the Scriptures.” Using Paul as an example, he demonstrates that one does not discover Jesus as the Son of God through Bible studies. One knows that Jesus is Lord through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and then one understand the Old Testament correctly. Thus correct faith comes before correct exegesis, and orthodox faith comes before orthodox exegesis.³⁶ Theology comes before exegesis both in time and space.

The method of theological interpretation used by fundamentalist spiritual interpreters reveals their concern for theological correctness. They not only emphasize textual inerrancy, but also theological inerrancy. In fact, one important characteristic of fundamentalism is that it originated in opposing the destruction of traditional Christian doctrines by nineteenth-century liberalism, and strongly defending the fundamental truth regarded as inviolable. As many liberals deny traditional doctrines through restructuring and new exegesis of the Scriptures (such as re-discovering the Jesus of the Gospels), fundamentalists are skeptical toward liberal and independent Biblical exegesis, believing exegetes do not have the

right to ignore the traditional doctrines of the church and to interpret arbitrarily. The results of Biblical exegesis must correspond to the fundamental doctrines. Correct exegesis is correct theological exegesis. From this we may agree with James Barr's observation that the fundamentalists (and the later evangelicals) are more faithful to their theological tradition than to the authority of Scriptural evidence.³⁷

But we have to add solemnly that these orthodox doctrines held by the fundamentalists and discarded by the liberals (such as virgin birth and resurrection from the dead) were given by Jesus Christ to the apostles and transmitted to the church. They were earlier than the formation of the New Testament canon, and were defended by church fathers and the catholic church. Church fathers used this doctrinal tradition to judge between orthodoxy and heresy, to recognize the Old Testament and to establish the New Testament. The formation of the Christian Bible is inseparable from this tradition of faith.³⁸ Therefore we cannot interpret the Christian Bible apart from this Christian tradition of faith. And we have to resist those who advocate freedom from this tradition of faith and attempt to redefine Christianity through Scriptural exegesis under the disguise of honoring the supreme authority of the Scriptures.

Is this violating the reformation principle of "Scripture alone"? Yes and no. If the principle of "Scripture alone" is discussed in

abstraction, we can certainly say that if the Bible is the supreme authority, no other authorities (including church tradition and doctrines) should be put above it, not to mention clamping it into a rigid system of doctrines. Spiritual interpretation has thus violated the prime principle of giving priority to the Scriptures. But if we return to the theological tradition of the reformation, we will see that the reformers did not understand "Scripture alone" in this way. Luther, Calvin and others have never held that exegetes should abandon the theological "prejudice" of trinitarian doctrine, and deduce freely from the Scriptures whether God is triune or quadruple. The reformers firmly believed in the basic doctrines, especially the three early creeds of the catholic church. There is no room for free discussion here. They were not humanists. Personal freedom and rights were not their concern, and did not have any place in religious matters. The principle of "Scripture alone" was to them a weapon against the claim of the Roman Catholic Church to be the highest authority of doctrinal teaching, including the later addition of non-Biblical doctrines. They have never advocated a Christianity without any defined doctrines and free for anyone to interpret from the Bible. We cannot put the reformers and the nineteenth-century liberals on the same level.

In raising the principle of "Scripture alone", the reformers have not broken the linkage of the Scriptures with traditional doctrines and made exegesis an independent enterprise beyond the

constraint of doctrines. The Bible belongs to the Christian church, and the canon is the common testimony of the community of faith. So exegesis is also a church ministry which should be guided by church traditions. There is no such thing as private exegesis in which I can interpret in whatever ways I like.

In fact when advocating the principle of “Scripture alone”, Luther at the same time insisted on the principle of theological interpretation. He opposed the allegorical interpretation of the traditional catholic church, but taught that the Old Testament had to be interpreted spiritually. What is the difference between spiritual and allegorical interpretation? According to Luther, spiritual interpretation emphasizes deeper spiritual meanings without discarding the literal sense,³⁹ and it is founded on the Christocentric history of salvation. In other words, Luther proposes to use Jesus Christ and His gospel as the central theme of the whole Bible, and demands a Christological interpretation of the Old Testament.⁴⁰ He even uses this as the norm to judge the canonicity of the Scriptures.⁴¹ This is obviously a kind of spiritual interpretation and Christocentric theological interpretation.

The fundamentalistic spiritual interpretation and theological exegesis have neither forsaken the theological tradition of the Reformation nor violated the principle of Scripture alone of the reformers.

c. Defects of Theological Exegesis

One of the most often criticized points of spiritual interpreters is the confusion of “personal opinion” with “spiritual sense”. This criticism is not without reason. Too often we see from these spiritual interpreters not only their insistence on fundamentalist faith, but also their twisting the texts to suit their personal theological ideas. Watchman Nee is well known for using the Scriptures as an exemplar for his model of church reform.⁴² Wang Ming-dao and John Sung also often exploit spiritual interpretation to support their attacks upon church abuses. So when interpreting the story of “the good Samaritan”, John Sung interprets the priest who passed by without giving a helping hand as the pastors of the church:

A person going “down” to Jericho:	spiritual downfall
Jericho:	place of death
robbers:	the devil
robbed of riches:	hearts grabbed away
priest:	church pastors
Samaritan:	Jesus
oil:	stirring of the Holy Spirit
wine:	blood of Jesus
cloth:	discipline of the Holy Spirit
ass:	guidance of the Holy Spirit
inn:	spiritual church
two denarii:	New & Old Testaments
Samaritan returning:	parousia of the Lord ⁴³

And in the story of “the prodigal son”, he attacks relentlessly the big denominations which stress social service, the Little Flocks of Watchman Nee and the Brethren:

father:	God
servant:	Holy Spirit
robe:	robe of righteousness (given by the servant, Holy Spirit)
ring:	seal of the Holy Spirit
shoes:	shoes of the gospel of peace
elder son farming:	serving society (deriding advocates of social gospel)
elder son obeying the father:	obeying human authority (deriding the Little Flocks)
elder son loving kid:	loving Bible study and breaking bread gatherings (deriding the Little Flocks)
elder son loving friends:	forming brethren societies (deriding the Brethren) ⁴⁴

This typology is obviously arbitrary. After comparing the father in the story of “the prodigal son” with God, he compares the elder son who obeys the father to those who obey human authority instead of God. No rule can be seen in this comparison, and there is no consistency. His purpose is not to find from the text the message intended by the author, but putting his preconceived ideas into the text, using the text to support his preconception. This probably is the worst example of spiritual interpretation.

Yet, even though we may say that John Sung and other spiritual interpreters have raped the original meanings of some of the texts, we do not worry that their spiritual interpretations will create heresies. What they undertake is theological exegesis, reading their theology into the texts. Exegesis itself is completely unimportant, and the key is in their original theological thoughts.

Their theological thoughts are not changed in the process of exegesis, and the results are predetermined. As long as their theological thoughts are not heresies, the fruit of their spiritual interpretation, no matter how weird, will not be heresies. There is not even the possibility of creating heresies.

Nevertheless, we have to admit that theological interpretation has its defects, the greatest of which is violating the first principle of hermeneutics, which is exegesis and not eisegesis.⁴⁵ Even though this may not distort the original doctrinal meaning of the Scriptures (assuming all doctrines are Biblical), it will trivialize and formalize the Biblical truth. Therefore, if all the texts are forced into a fixed frame of faith, the texts will not be given enough freedom to speak, and the Biblical message will be trivialized. Truth will become reductionistic, and the purpose of studying the Scriptures will become revising known doctrines instead of preparing to listen to new teachings. The author has pointed out this realistic attitude of faith in another article:

This realism of faith has indeed hindered our listening to new messages from God while reading the Scriptures, not allowing the texts to give us new experience and inspiration about the world and ourselves. We dream we have mastered all the mysteries of Christianity, and reduced faith into a set of simple and perfect fundamental doctrines. This set of doctrines is comprehensive and impeccable, thus all texts are just explicating it from different perspectives. So it is not an overemphasis to say that we do not expect to obtain new knowledge from the Scriptures. If there is knowledge, it is nothing more than a revision of the known facts. We are confident that we have the key to exegesis and have fully

comprehended the Christian truth.⁴⁶

We may criticize spiritual interpreters for trivializing the Scriptural messages and may reject some of their exegesis, noticing their incongruence with the original meaning of the text. But there is no need to worry about their using this method to create heresies, or to overemphasize the danger of spiritual interpretation. Its danger is never greater than any other interpretation methods.

3. Interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures

It can be seen that all Chinese scholars who are considered to be spiritual interpreters advocate interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures. Spiritual interpretation is to them part and parcel of the principle of interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures. Interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures is the hermeneutical principle, while spiritual interpretation is a practical application of this principle.

a. Unity of the Scriptures

Interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures presupposes Scriptural unity emphasized by the reformers. The sixty six books of the Bible are believed to be consistent and mutually explicating. Wang Ming-dao says, “The teachings of the sixty six books of the New and Old Testaments are from the beginning to the end relating, corresponding and consistent.”⁴⁷ Advocates of this principle often

stress the divine authorship of the Scriptures and underestimate their human writers. They believe God is the true author of the Scriptures, while the human writers were nothing but the pens of God, with no contribution in ideas of their own. As it is the same God who wrote the sixty six books, the ideas must be consistent, and there must be a well-thought out plan and meticulous plot. Compared to the similarities of the same author and the same plot, the divergence of different books due to particularities of historical backgrounds become negligible.⁴⁸ This is especially true for the readers of the Scriptures, because their concern should not be the differences between the books, but the complete revelation of God dispersed among the books. The revelation in each book is incomplete. The entire picture of the revelation of God can only be obtained by integrating the sixty six books together. Stephen Chan says,

No one in history has obtained the full revelation of God. God chooses at various times through the Holy Spirit vessels fit to be used at that age, and reveals to His servants to the extent they can receive. Adding up all the revelations of the prophets of God and the apostles, this is the full revelation of God to the church.⁴⁹

Therefore the complete revelation of God cannot be understood without reading the entire Scriptures as a unity. We must proceed from the “parts” to the “entirety”. At the same time, as each passage is only part of the complete revelation of God and is relating to the entirety, the meaning and significance of each passage cannot be correctly assessed without a knowledge of this

complete revelation. So we must also proceed from the “entirety” to the “parts”. Sharing his practical experience in interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures, Wang Ming-dao points out that this is the best way to handle all difficulties in exegesis:

Some may say that there are many contradictions in the Scriptures. If some one says this, I can be sure that he has not read the Scriptures carefully from cover to cover. If he has done so, he will certainly realize that there are not only no contradictions, but cross-references everywhere, explaining one another. Whenever I come across a difficult and inperspicuous passage which I cannot figure out at that time, I will note it down, hoping to find an explanation elsewhere. I cannot have a satisfactory answer even after asking several persons and searching a lot of books, until finally I find the most appropriate explanation from the Bible itself. Sometimes I am asked which one is the best commentary of the Bible, and I answer, the best commentary is the Bible itself.⁵⁰

b. Spiritual Interpretation is the Application of Interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures

Theoretically speaking, advocates of interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures may not have to use a lot of spiritual interpretation, and may not even consider themselves spiritual interpreters.⁵¹ But practically speaking, unless we limit the principle of interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures to the study of words and phrases of the Scriptures and exercises of cross-referencing, metaphorical and allegorical interpretations have to be employed once the Biblical narratives and stories are to be linked up together, because these are the only ways to transcend the boundaries of context and content of the texts. Spiritual interpretation is thus

inevitable, it is just a matter of the extent to which it is employed.

John Sung is the one who has used this principle of interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures most consistently, even to the verge of danger. He employs the method of “narrative interpretation” to link up originally irrelevant New and Old Testament texts. As he believes the entire Bible is a unity and different parts are mutually supplementing, a group of numbers in one passage can be regarded as the internal structure of another book, and the theme of a certain New Testament passage can be the key to some Old Testament books. (See appendix 2) For example, he correlates the ten plagues of Moses to the ten commandments,⁵² and the twelve years of age of Jairus’ daughter to the twelve tribes of Israel.⁵³

This method of interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures has been criticized. James Barr points out that the fundamentalistic view of the Bible is rigid and fossilized. This, which he has dubbed the definitional approach, regards the entire Bible to be the revelation of God and the will of God is eternal, so there must be harmony of content between all books, with no variations or divergences. They do not accept a historical development or progress of God’s revelation, and hence turn the sixty six books into a static plain.⁵⁴

IV. Spiritual Interpretation and Personal Freedom

1. Affirming the Rights of the Exegetes?

Another common misunderstanding of spiritual interpretation is that this method is thought to promote personal ideas in interpretation, allowing subjective factors to infiltrate into the process of exegesis. Some relate this traditional method of interpretation to modern hermeneutical theories, thinking that it advocates that exegetes are not undertaking objective interpretation but are reading personal contexts and ideas into the texts.⁵⁵ That is to say, this method presupposes that the text itself does not have any fixed meaning and there is no necessary connections between literary symbols and their meanings. The meaning is not contained in the text, but is between the text and the reader (or more radically, only inside the reader). So the reader is not outside the text or approaching it without prejudice. His internal thought and external context (time and space, status, politics, society, economy, culture, etc.) are shaping the meanings he “obtains”. Strictly speaking, he is not a passive reader, but an actively constructing author (the original author of the text is already “dead”!). Thus the meaning of a text is not uniform or fixed, but is continuously created by the readers in their contexts. The number of meanings is as many as that of the readers.

It is obviously a confusion to compare spiritual interpretation to modern hermeneutics. There may be a common point between the two, which is that both of them do not believe the meaning of the text is within and confined by the words. Beyond this there is no similarity. Just take the question of the location of meaning. As said above, the new hermeneutics believes the meaning is somewhere between the text and the readers or is entirely within the readers, and there is more than one meaning, which can be created without end. But spiritual interpreters believe the meaning lies between the text and the author (if not entirely in the author), and there is only one meaning, waiting to be discovered with effort. This difference alone can show that they are totally different and incompatible.

2. Guided by the Holy Spirit

a. Excluding Human Factors

Apparently, human action is very prominent in the process of spiritual interpretation. But actually the contrary is the truth. It excludes personal factors, not allowing personal favor or even rational judgment to mingle with the divine task of interpreting the divine Bible. So spiritual interpreters emphasize the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the process of interpretation, for He is the Spirit. They believe the Word of God can only be fully understood by relying on God Himself, and human reason does not have the final

word.

John Sung's view is probably the most typical.⁵⁶ When he was studying at the New York Union Seminary, the base of liberal theology, he strongly felt the devastation caused by liberalism upon orthodox faith, and he stood firmly in the fundamentalistic camp. Due to his contempt for liberalism, there was gradually developed in him an anti-theology and anti-intellectual inclination, thinking theological studies could only tempt one onto the road of unbelief. His anti-intellectual inclination directly influences his exegesis in opposing the use of reason in interpreting the Scriptures. He believes the method of a spiritual worker in studying the Scriptures is "not to use human wisdom, not to use theological knowledge, not to use scientific methods."⁵⁷ He even opposes the use of exegetical tools, believing this to be exalting humans instead of God. In his view, the only proper way of studying the Scriptures is direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit through devotional studies.⁵⁸ As the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, He is the only key to the mysteries of the Scriptures. It is only through His enlightenment that humans can enter into the Scriptural mysteries. The continuous inspiration of the Holy Spirit is crucial. He who inspired the Biblical writers in the past will inspire the readers today, giving them direct illumination from the texts. John Sung says,

The Bible is the Word of God. So only spiritual persons who are filled with the Holy Spirit can understand it ... Biblical truth is a mystery. The mind and ways of God are not

the same as those of humans. So one cannot interpret the Scriptures according to human mind and human reason.⁵⁹

He believes the Holy Spirit gives illumination so as to reveal the hidden lines of thought behind the texts, or an overarching structure of the entire book, or a central theme. These are the “mysteries” of the Bible, only to be understood through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

Watchman Nee goes even further than John Sung. He believes the Bible is the Word of God in the past spoken through prophets and apostles, but it is now merely a record of previous revelations of God and not a revelation for today. Even if we study the entire Bible thoroughly, we are still not listening to the Word of God. Revelation of God comes through Jesus Christ, so the revelation of God can only be known when Jesus Christ is touched when reading the Scriptures. How can one touch Jesus Christ? Intellectual knowledge can only lead us to the book, but it is only the Holy Spirit who can guide us through the Bible into the Word of God, where we encounter Christ. Thus the Bible itself is not the revelation of God for today, and studying the Bible alone cannot let us understand God’s revelation. The revelation of God is not even inside the Bible. Nee says, “Therefore we do not understand the Bible from the Bible, but from the light and revelation within it.”⁶⁰

Nee strongly emphasizes the continuous revelation of God and His “new revelations” to us. He thinks the revelation of God is

temporal, relevant only at its time; after that it is no longer a revelation, but only a teaching. “What God said yesterday and the day before are teachings. Only what He says today is revelation.”⁶¹ So even the Bible itself is temporal: “The words in the Bible were once living words, but they are not living to anybody today. They become alive only when the Holy Spirit speaks again.”⁶² If the Holy Spirit does not speak to the reader, the Bible is merely teachings. Therefore only the revelation of the Holy Spirit today is revelation, and the Bible itself is no longer the eternal revelation of God nor the ultimate authority of faith.

This way of separating the Bible from the Holy Spirit and regarding the Bible as the revelation of God in the past is certainly problematic. But what Watchman Nee wants to stress is actually that humans cannot rely on their own reason and wisdom to understand the Scriptures, but should be humbly guided and mastered by the Holy Spirit. Only then can the Word of God be released without hindrance. The purpose of his stress on the overwhelming role of the Holy Spirit and the mystification of Bible studies is not to debase the Bible, but to deny human thinking in the process of exegesis.

b. “Personal ideas” Infiltrating “Divine Ideas”

Overemphasizing the absolute guidance of the Holy Spirit, neglecting or denying methods and constraints, and placing human

reasons and God's ideas at contrasting poles will completely mystify the task of exegesis and leave no objective rules and standards. Its most probable result is that the personal charisma and authority of the exegetes will become the only standard of judgment between right and wrong. As there are no longer any objectively recognized overriding exegetical standards in the church, there is no way the audience can judge the correctness of exegesis. When the exegetes appeal to the direct enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the audience can only surrender----who dares to challenge the oracles of God? Therefore, emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of exegesis will turn the role of the exegete from a reader of the Scriptures to a spokesperson of God, and exegesis becomes divine oracles. It is no longer human opinion, but infallible (at least its correctness is not open for suspicion).⁶³ The problem is that we can never ensure human opinions will not infiltrate into this entire process of illumination, and hence there is no way to prevent someone using the form of divine oracles to create heresy. The author has said,

Since there cannot be any rules concerning the guidance of the Spirit (who can limit the locus of the freedom of the Spirit?), the exegetes can only follow the feeling of the spirit through intuition, imagination and free correlation to bestow contemporary significance to the text. We certainly cannot deny the possibility of the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit during spiritual analysis, but it is also obvious and undeniable that personal opinions often mingle with spiritual meanings in these interpretations.⁶⁴

When discussing the exegesis of John Sung, Liu Yi-ling points

out that his exegetical method of breaking codes is “not only forced and arbitrary, but is almost distorting and obtrusive.”⁶⁵ Stephen Chan also points out reservedly when evaluating the exegetical method of his uncle, Watchman Nee, that “this method of interpretation is more attractive to the readers and would not be boring and dry, but it is very easy (and unknowingly) to add in personal ideas. It is more safe and careful to restrict the text by the context.”⁶⁶ Originally intended to bar off “personal ideas” with “spiritual meanings”, spiritual interpretation has unexpectedly resulted in the prominence of “personal ideas”.

Nevertheless, the author has to stress again that the motivation of spiritual interpreters in opposing “human ideas” with “divine ideas” is apologetic. Their purpose is not to speak for God and create novel teachings, but to resist the destruction by Biblical criticisms of orthodox doctrines. Therefore they may have gone astray in interpreting certain passages, misinterpreting the words of God and adding personal theological ideas, but they will not deliberately establish novel teachings and drift away from Christian orthodoxy. In short, minor mistakes are unavoidable in spiritual interpretation (there may even be a lot), but there has not been any grave error. We can criticize their exegesis for the **potential** of creating serious errors or of the **possibility** of heresy, but after all we have to admit that **actually** they have not become heretics.

I am not saying that there is a mechanism within spiritual interpretation that can prevent abuse and heresy. But advocates of this method espouse beforehand a system of rigid fundamentalistic faith, and this method is used to defend this faith. It is their theological stand and apologetic motivation that keep them from heresy. There is nothing wrong in criticizing spiritual interpretation in isolation for its potential danger of creating heresies, but it is ahistorical and unfair to claim that Chinese spiritual interpreters can possibly become heretics. Providing we know that their exegesis is guided by theology (fundamentalism) instead of establishing theology through exegesis, we can be sure that it is highly improbable that they will become heretics. No matter how incredible their exegetical results may be, they have no effect upon their theological stand. Since doctrinal conclusions have been reached before exegesis, its risk is even less than that of grammatical-historical exegesis.

V. Conclusion:Reappraisal of Spiritual Interpretation

To sum up what has been said, we can see that the spiritual interpretation of the Chinese church is not a free interpretation as it is commonly thought to be, much less inventing Biblical ideas through personal free correlation. The entire interpretation process is restricted theologically by a rigid doctrinal system of fundamentalism, and no freedom is given to the exegetes.

The purpose of Chinese spiritual interpreters in stressing "spiritual meanings" is to bar off "human opinions" from the exegetical process. In order to defend the holiness of the Bible and distinguish it from other ancient texts, they declare that it cannot be interpreted with common methods relying on human reasons and textual studies. In no way can we equate this method with advocating personal freedom and right in interpretation, because its original purpose is precisely to oppose this freedom and right. It is a confusion to identify spiritual interpretation with post-modern hermeneutics.

It can be said in general that grammatical-historical interpretation and others emphasize the establishment of a set of objective and strict procedures in analyzing the text, believing that this procedure will produce acceptable exegesis. It is not so important that the results be congruent with tradition. But the emphasis of spiritual interpretation is not on the restrictions of

method and procedure, but on the congruity of the results with traditional doctrines. In other words, how typology is done is not so important. Anybody can have his own "illumination", and there is no procedure that must be followed. The crucial point is that the typology must be pointing toward the gospel of Jesus Christ. The results justify the methods.

The main purpose of spiritual interpretation is on the one hand apologetic, resisting the threat of Biblical criticism Christian orthodoxy ever since the eighteenth century, and rejecting those who interpret the Scriptures freely without submitting to traditional doctrines but use their exegesis to attack tradition. On the other hand its purpose is to demonstrate the effectiveness and applicability of the Bible, bridging the gap between the texts and the readers, turning the words of God into the living word. Similar to the allegorical interpretation of the second century, spiritual interpretation is mainly applied to the exegesis of the Old Testament, Christianizing it so as to abandon the literal content of a portion of it (such as the liturgical rites) as well as to affirm the significance of this abandoned portion, recognizing its spiritual but not literal authority.

As has been pointed out again and again, no matter how forcefully and unreasonably spiritual interpreters have distorted the original meaning of a text during exegesis, they cannot produce heresy. This is not just a practical improbability, but a theoretical

impossibility, because this method is actually not reading meanings out from the text, but reading meanings into the text. The conclusion is pre-determined before interpretation, and hence cannot be led astray by the “spiritual meaning” or “private opinion” of the interpreters. If we can be sure that these Chinese pastors are theologically conservative fundamentalists, there is no need to exaggerate the danger of their spiritual interpretation. John Sung’s interpretation is indeed fantastic, and Jia Yu-ming’s linking between the Old and the New Testaments is also shocking. Yet it is impossible for them to teach heresies.

This method of course can be easily abused to support a certain theological viewpoint, a certain diagnosis of the church or a certain reform program for the church. But even if these diagnoses or programs are too radical or erroneous, we cannot simply put the blame on spiritual interpretation, accusing it of leading to erroneous conclusions. One thing is sure, they are not products of exegesis, but are ideas originally existing in the spiritual interpreters.

In order to prevent this danger of abuse, many modern evangelical scholars advocate a strict scrutiny or even complete replacement of this exegetical method. The author respects the motivation of these scholars, but is very suspicious of the practicality of this approach. How can we establish the relevance and applicability of the Old Testament to the Christian church if typology is abandoned? Furthermore, I believe this will be even

more dangerous than spiritual interpretation, because it not only implies that we will have difficulty finding the relevance and applicability of the Bible to the church, but also that we abandon the pursuit of this relevance and applicability from the perspective of the Christian church. There is already a Chinese theological trend of many Old Testament scholars loosing themselves from the bondage of Christianity and restoring the Old Testament as the Jewish Torah, discussing directly the modern spirit of the Torah. This de-Christianizing of the Old Testament will tear (Judaic) Bible studies from church life. The Old Testament becomes nothing more than an ancient text full of wisdom for our reference only, and is no longer the Bible giving guidance to the church.

However, no self-proclaimed fundamentalist or evangelical will deny that seeking for the truth is the necessary attitude of a reader of the Bible. Any deliberate distortion of the Scriptural meaning should not be undertaken by one who respects the authority of the Bible. If there is the potential danger of distorting the Scriptural meaning in spiritual interpretation, we should be aware of it when employing this method. If there is any interpretation deviating from the Scriptural meaning, no matter how good is the intention, or how deep is the spiritual sense, or which spiritual leader utters it, we have to criticize it without hesitation. We cannot discard the truth and ignore the difference between the divine revelation and human interpretation simply for the sake of

usefulness. We cannot argue that it is acceptable if erroneous understanding brings correct action, otherwise we will lose our qualification of defending orthodoxy against heresies. For we will then be no different from the heresies which emphasize practicalness, and we will betray the evangelical tradition that inherited fundamentalism. Therefore the author has no intention to protect the Chinese spiritual interpreters. I believe many of the interpretations of John Sung, Jia Yu-ming and Watchman Nee are unacceptable.

Yet, as a historian, I still think it necessary to justify these Chinese pastors and the method of spiritual interpretation. We have to understand why they advocated this method in their times, the strength of this method, as well its effects in history. We have to distinguish this spiritual interpretation under the umbrella of fundamentalism from the radical and arbitrary allegorical interpretation in church history, pointing out that the former is not as arbitrary and dangerous as has been thought, so that its value will not be overwhelmed by unrealistic fear.

The author particularly disagrees with the accusation that spiritual interpreters have betrayed the reformation tradition, and the criticism of this method of interpretation under the glorious reformation banner of "Scriptures alone". I have to point out that these spiritual interpreters' acceptance of the reformation tradition is much greater than their deviation from it. Even though the

reformers were apparently opposing the allegorical interpretation of the medieval catholic church, their Christocentric spiritual interpretation is not much different from the spiritual interpretation of the Chinese church today. So it cannot be said that the latter has deviated from the reformation tradition. Besides, Chinese spiritual interpreters are consistent with the reformers in respect to the Bible and the emphasis on the practical aspect of Bible studies. David Kelsey points out in his discussion on Protestantism that the reformers' recognition of the inspiration of the Bible is indivisible from their faith in its power to transform life. Therefore the purpose of Bible studies is not only to obtain knowledge, but also to live it out in daily life. There are three hermeneutical principles of the reformers: (1) The Bible is the authority for testifying to faith, and is written for the sake of Christian living. So hermeneutics and homiletics are inseparable. It is not a self-satisfying game of a small group of Biblical scholars inside an ivory tower. (2) The Bible is a unity, with the sixty six books forming an entirety, and the New and Old Testaments are harmonious and consistent. In other words, the Old Testament has to be interpreted according to the gospel. (3) As the sixty six books of the Bible are inspired by the same God, they are mutually explaining, and the best exegetical method is interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures.⁶⁷ We have seen that the spiritual interpreters have been faithful to these principles.

Finally it has to be mentioned that the author has the contention that if there has been any serious exegetical errors in the past hundred years of Chinese church history, it was not due to spiritual interpretation, but literal interpretation. That is to say, lacking understanding in the genre of the Biblical texts, exegetes have not interpreted allegorical texts allegorically. It is the literal interpretation of these texts that produces devious conclusions.⁶⁸ So it is literal interpretation instead of spiritual interpretation which is the culprit in producing heresies. But as this article is already too lengthy, this contention will be treated in another occasion.

(Note: This article is part of the “bicentennial Chinese Biblical Studies” program held by the author together with Dr. Philip Chia.)

Appendix 1

Examples of Jia Yu-ming's Spiritual Interpretation

Jia Yu-ming's spiritual interpretation is illustrated as follows with his interpretation of Exod. 25-28, where God ordered Moses to build the tabernacle. Jia believes the sequence of God's command for Moses was like this: first of all the ark, then the show table, the gold lampstand, and finally the altar. This prefigures the sequence of God's redemption in Christ, and each of the positions, materials and forms has spiritual significance.

1. The Passing of the Lord

a. From the Ark to the Altar: From the Old Testament to the New

ark: throne of God, redemption of the Old Testament
altar: blood of Christ, redemption of the New Testament

b. From the Courtyard to the Holy Place:

courtyard:	place where Jesus fulfills His salvation
two holy vessels, altar and bronze pot:	water and blood flowing from the side of Jesus.
Altar:	being justified
bronze pot:	being sanctified

2. The Passing of the Believers

a. Door

door:	Jesus
three-fold door:	triple relationship with Jesus
door of the holy place:	door of dedication; consecrated persons
curtain of the most holy place:	door of victory
bronze bases:	patience of judgment
silver bases:	signifying redemption
gold rings and hooks:	signifying the honor of God

b. Path

1) courtyard:	saved believers
	altar and bronze pot in courtyard
a) altar:	the cross of Jesus, signifying justification and life material
	acacia wood: humanity of Jesus
	bronze: signifying the pain of Jesus in judgment
	form square: signifying the perfection of Jesus
	four corners: signifying the redemptive power of Jesus
	empty: signifying the self-emptying of Jesus
b) bronze pot	signifying cleansing and life material
	bronze: signifying the suffering of Jesus in the world
	mirror bronze: being aware of one's filthiness
	women's mirror bronze: believers should always decorate like women to please the Lord
	form with bases: separated from the ground, signifying holiness

2) holy place--three utensils

a) show table

material

acacia wood overlaid with gold: signifying the double nature of Jesus

form

gold molding inner rim: providence of faith of believers not to be destroyed by unbelievers

outer rim: providence of blessings of believers

function

show bread: signifying Jesus is our bread of life

b) lampstand: signifying Jesus is the light of the world, also a type of the church

material

one piece of pure gold: the church will not develop without persecution

form

seven lamps: signifying the perfect church

six branches of equal height: equality of believers

middle branch higher: Jesus as the head of the church

c) altar of incense

material

acacia wood overlaid with pure gold: signifying the double nature of Jesus

form

square: signifying the perfection of Jesus
four corners: signifying the power of prayer

function

burning incense: signifying prayer

3) Holy of holies: signifying spirit of man

without windows and lamps: signifying God is the only light inside the human spirit. Otherwise there is complete darkness

a) ark

material

pure gold and acacia wood: signifying the double nature of Jesus

form

poles always inside the rings: signifying God's presence as we are pilgrimming on earth

function: correlating the condemnation of the Old Testament and the grace of the New Testament (Christ)

tablets enclosed: on the one hand the sin of our violation of the law, on the other hand the perfection of the law by Christ

golden urn of manna enclosed: on the one hand the sin of collecting manna on Sabbath, on the other hand Christ is the bread of life

Aaron's budding rod enclosed: on the one hand signifying the sin of being rebellious, on the other hand the resurrection of the Lord and our life in Him

- b) mercy seat: signifying the covering of sin by God
- c) cherubim: upholding the righteousness of God

c. Scene

tabernacle: signifying Jesus

four layers of tent: signifying different images of Jesus. He is not attractive externally, but beautiful and elegant inside

- 1) hides of sea cows: signifying Jesus was tempted in various ways on earth, and that he has no beautiful appearance to be admired
- 2) skins of red ram: signifying the faithfulness of Jesus in ministry, and his obedience until death, as well as the covering of our sins by His blood
- 3) goat hair cover: signifying the complete covering of our unrighteousness by the Lord

4) pleated curtains: made of white linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn

white linen: signifying the holiness of Jesus
blue yarn: signifying Jesus belongs to heaven
purple yarn: signifying the honor of Jesus
scarlet yarn: signifying the sacrifice of Jesus

d. Meeting place

1) three portions of the tabernacle: signifying different stages of life of believers

courtyard: salvation of spirit
holy place: salvation of soul
holy of holies: salvation of body

2) the three portions also reflect the different ways of encounter between believers and God

(See Jia Yu-ming, *Essential Teachings of the Bible* vol. 1, pp.218-228)

Appendix 2

John Sung's Biblical Connecting Themes

John Sung loves to tie up an entire book of the Bible with a single theme, and to divide up the book into regular sections. He believes as long as the central theme of each book can be grasped, the entirety can be understood from its center, and the whole book can be understood. Very often he uses a New Testament passage as the theme of an Old Testament book, believing the teachings of that Old Testament book can be seen by magnifying the corresponding New Testament passage. This theme is the secret door into an entire book, a code hidden by the Holy Spirit deliberately in the Bible. Only spiritual persons under the guidance of the Holy Spirit can discover it. He mainly uses the New Testament to interpret the Old, vice versa only in very special cases (as in interpreting John).

In the following is a list of his themes and sectioning of the sixty six books of the Bible:

Genesis----No connecting theme or sections.

Exodus----“Rebirth” as the theme.

Leviticus----“Life of encounter between believer and God”.

Numbers----“Pilgrimage in wilderness”, a figure of the spiritual sojourn of believers.

Deuteronomy----“Submit to God, look up to God”.

Joshua----No connecting theme or sections.

Judges----Acts 8:26-40 as the key.

Ruth----“Parable of holiness”.

I Samuel---Song of Hanna as the key.
II Samuel---No connecting theme or sections.
I Kings---Mark 11 as the key, the topic is “authority of Christians”.
II Kings---The main message is “the baptism of the Spirit”, i.e., the work of the Holy Spirit.
I Chronicles---“Parable of sowing seeds” as the key.
II Chronicles---Explained with “the nine spiritual stages”.
Ezra---Mark 5 as the key.
Nehemiah---Ephesians 6:10-20 as the key.
Esther---Matthew 24:29-31 as the key.
Job---Mark 15 as the key.
Psalms---The five books correspond to the Pentateuch.
Proverbs---Sermon on the Mount as the key, Matthew 5-7; Proverbs 1-9 are the “nine blessedness on the Mount.
Ecclesiastes---Luke 12:15-21 as the key.
Songs of Songs---No connecting theme or sections.
Isaiah---The 66 chapters correspond to the sixty six books of the Bible. Ch.1-39 correspond to the Old Testament, while Ch.40-66 correspond to the New Testament. Or magnify the Gospel of Mark to interpret the entire book.
Jeremiah---No connecting theme or sections.
Lamentations---No connecting theme or sections.
Ezekiel---Corresponds to Acts, chapter by chapter. Repeat after ch.28.
Daniel---No connecting theme or sections.
Hosea---Luke 15:11-24 as the key, one verse corresponding to one chapter. Also reveals the sins of the contemporary church.
Joel---The three chapters signify going with the Lord to the three mounts, Sinai, Calvary and Zion.
Amos---The nine chapters correspond to the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit.
Obadiah---Connecting the book with “nine blessednesses”.
Jonah---Similarly connecting the book with “nine blessednesses”.
Micah---No connecting theme or sections.
Nahum---No connecting theme or sections.
Habakkuk---No connecting theme or sections.
Zephaniah---The three parables of Matthew 25 as the key.

Haggai----The theme is the crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension and glorification of the Lord.

Zechariah----No connecting theme or sections.

Malachi----No connecting theme or sections.

Matthew----The "love of Jesus" as the main topic.

Mark----The main topic is also the "love of Jesus", explained with I Corinthians 13:4-8.

Luke----The Magnificat and the Song of Zechariah as the key.

John----Psalm 23 as the key.

Acts----Ch. 1 as the key.

Romans----The "fundamental teachings of faith" as the theme.

I Corinthians----The main message is the "unity of believers".

II Corinthians----The main message is the "living exemplar of ministers".

Galatians----"Freedom" as the basic teaching.

Ephesians----"Christian hope" as the theme.

Philippians----"Christian joy" as the theme.

Colossians----The four main messages are "thirsty, come, drink, flow", i.e., understanding the mystery, getting the mystery, living abundantly in the mystery, and proclaiming the mystery.

I Thessalonians----"Patience" as the theme.

II Thessalonians----"Relationship between parousia of Christ and life on earth" as the theme.

I Timothy----"Piety" as the theme.

II Timothy----"Trial and faith" as the theme.

Titus----The three chapters are the triumphant proclamations of Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Philemon----"Christian intercession" as the theme.

Hebrews----The main message is that Christian faith, hope and love have to be established on the nine foundations of Jesus Christ.

James----"Behavior of faith" as the theme.

I Peter----II Peter 1:5-7 as the key, "eight-story pagoda of Christianity."

II Peter----No connecting theme or sections.

I John----"Christian and spiritual encounter" as the theme.

II John----"On truth and love" as the theme.

III John----“Manifestation of the truth” as the theme.

Jude----No connecting theme or sections.

Revelations----No connecting theme or sections.

(According to the notes of a 1-month Bible study course held by John Sung at Xiamen in 1936. “Sermon Collections 1, 2, and 3”, *Complete Collections of John Sung* vols. 4-6.)]

Notes

¹ Lam Wing-hung, *The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee* (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1985), pp.287-288.

² *Ibid.*, *Wong Ming-tao and the Chinese Church* (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1982), p.181.

³ Lam himself agrees to this. See *ibid.*, pp.179-180.

⁴ Maureen Quilligan, who studies allegorical interpretations, thinks allegories are not different or deeper levels of meaning other than the literal meaning, but are the linking ideas that appear in the readers' self-consciousness, and therefore have a horizontal relationship with the literal meaning, but not a vertical relationship. See Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.28.

⁵ For the definition of allegory and allegorical interpretation, see R.J. Coggins & J.L. Houlden ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

⁶ Obviously the author has completely ignored here some post-modern interpretation which thinks the readers have the right to

neglect the author's intention or the apparent intention of the writings, and can create various meanings of interpretation freely at will.

⁷ Tsang Lam-fong, *Hermeneutics* (Hong Kong: Seed Press, 1980), p.223.

⁸ Chan Tsai-man, *Understanding Hermeneutics* (Taipei: Campus Books, 1988), p.68.

⁹ Moises Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible: the History of Interpretation in the Light of Current Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp.40-41.

¹⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*, volume 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p.111.

¹¹ Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: the Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p.124.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.125.

¹³ Robert M. Grant refers to Irenaeus, church father of the 3rd century, as the father of authoritative exegesis, for he emphasized

apostolic succession, insisting that only those bishops who succeeded the apostles had the authority and ability for correct Scriptural interpretation. See R.M. Grant & D. Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p.50.

Karlfried Froehlich supplements that besides Irenaeus, other church fathers of the same time had also appealed to church authority in judging the correctness of Scriptural interpretation, and one of them was Tertullian. See Karlfried Froehlich, ed. *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p.14.

¹⁴ Joseph W. Trigg thinks Origen was not only a Platonizing allegorizer, but also a strictly trained grammarian under a great Alexandrian linguist, and he was one of the most brilliant exegetes of the early church. Trigg, *ibid.*, p.153.

¹⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), p.84.

¹⁶ Wang Bao-xuan, "The Development of Classical Studies and the Reconstruction of Chinese Culture", Shen Qing-song ed., *Exegesis and Creativity* (Taipei: Union Post Cultural Fund, 1995), pp.21-23.

¹⁷ The best discussion on the development of the Gong-yang school, especially that in the Qing dynasty, is written by Lu Bao-qian, *History of Ideas in the Qing Dynasty* (Taipei: Guangwen Books, 1978), Ch. 6.

¹⁸ Wang Erh-min has very profound discoveries at this point. See his works *History of Political Thought in Late Qing* (Taipei: Students Books, 1969) & *History of Contemporary Chinese Thinkings* (Taipei: Huashi Press, 1977).

¹⁹ Zheng Zhiming, "Taoist teachings of the Taiwan folk *Lien-shu*", in *Zheng Zhiming, Religions and Culture* (Taipei: Taiwan Students Books, 1990), p.184.

²⁰ Lao Siguang has used this to explain the wonder of numerology. See Lao Siguang, "Reflections on Numerology", *Journal of Philosophy* vol. 3 (Jan., 1993), pp.5-6.

²¹ See Chuo Xinping, "Searching for Hidden Meanings and the Recognition of Chinese and Western Cultures", unpublished paper in "Seminar on History of Development of Chinese Christianity", 3 Oct., 1996.

²² Tang Zhijun et al. point out that the Chinese take the classics as fixed, final and unalterable. The only thing that can be done on

them is to comment. See Tang, *Classical Texts and Politics in West Han* (Shanghai Ancient Texts, 1994), p.348. But commentary can be never-ending, and its purpose is not to find out the original meaning of the text, but its application in time.

²³ Lam Wing-hung, *Wong Ming-tao and the Chinese Church*, p.181.

²⁴ Wang Ming-dao criticizes liberal theologians, saying, “What they teach is not the truth from the Bible, but imaginations from their mind. They do not believe in all the fundamental truths of the Bible, and they do not say this clearly, but have invented erroneous explanations to deny or to distort these fundamental truths. They actually do not believe in the Word, the revelation, the salvation and the gospel of God.” Wang, “Dangers of the Contemporary Church”, *Library of Wang Ming-dao* (Dou-liu: Baptist Mission, 1979), vol. 7, p.234.

²⁵ He said, “I only quote the Biblical words. These words are very simple, very clear and very easy to understand. I do not make any explanation, for there is no need for me to do so. Any true believer can understand these texts.” Wang, “We are for faith”, *ibid.*, p.276.

²⁶ James Barr harshly criticizes this Fundamentalistic method of harmonization of apparently diversified Scriptural passages, but he correctly points out that the concern of the Fundamentalists in exegesis is not only for the harmonization of Scriptural narrations, but also for doctrines. James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977), p.61.

²⁷ This is the method of interpreting the Old Testament with the New as emphasized by Samuel Tang. "Interpreting the Old Testament with the New is mainly to employ the method of typology. All facts are taken as types of the religious experience of the New Testament church, and every prophecy must have its fulfillment in Lord Jesus." Samuel Tang, *Discourses in Exegesis* (Taipei: Campus Books, 1984), p.20.

²⁸ Wang Ming-dao, "The Calling of Gideon", *Library of Wang Ming-dao* vol. 6, pp.1-17.

²⁹ Yang Shao-tang, *Outline of the Bible* (Penang: Malaysian Theological Seminary, 1968), p.12.

³⁰ Watchman Nee, "The Ministry of the Word of God", in *Complete Collections of Watchman Nee* (Hong Kong: Heavenly Food Press, 1992), vol. 10, p.121.

³¹ Jia Yu-ming, *Introduction to the Bible* (Hong Kong: Wang To Press, 1964), vol. 1, p.5.

³² John Sung, "A Retrospect on Ministry", *Complete Collections of John Sung* (Taipei: Great Light Books, 1988), vol. 8, p.234.

³³ John Sung, "Exodus", in "Sermon Collections 1", *Complete Collections of John Sung*, vol. 4, p.37.

³⁴ Donald G. Bloesch, "A Christological Hermeneutic: Crisis and Conflict in Hermeneutics," in Robert K. Johnston, ed., *The Use of Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), p.84.

³⁵ Wang Ming-dao, "The Charismatic Movement in the Light of the Bible", p.102.

³⁶ Watchman Nee, "The Ministry of God's Word", p.139-140.

³⁷ James Barr, *Escaping from Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1984), p.157.

³⁸ On the relationship between the Scriptures and the doctrinal tradition, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York:

Harper & Row, 1978), Ch. 2-3.

³⁹ However, Origen and others have not really denied the literal sense. They taught that there were several layers of meaning in the text. So Luther's attempt to distinguish himself from them was not very successful.

⁴⁰ See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. R.C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp.92f.

⁴¹ Luther's doubt concerning the canonicity of the Book of James because of his insistence on the doctrine of justification by faith is widely known. David H. Kelsey thinks the reformers emphasized the Christocentricity of the Scriptures so much that they even allowed the Scriptures to have some "errors". David H. Kelsey, "Protestant Attitudes regarding Methods of Biblical Interpretation", in Frederick E. Greenspahn, ed., *Scripture in the Jewish and Christian Traditions: Authority, Interpretation, Relevance* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), p.139.

⁴² Stephen C.T. Chan, *My Uncle, Watchman Nee* (Hong Kong: Alliance Press, 1975), pp.64-73.

⁴³ John Sung, "Holiness 1", "Sermon Collections 2", *Complete Collections of John Sung*, vol. 2. pp. 100-108.

⁴⁴ John Sung, "New Life", "Sermon Collections 2", *Complete Collections of John Sung*, vol. 2, pp.137-147.

⁴⁵ Samuel Tang, *Discourses on Exegesis*, p.35. However, Tang does not explicate his saying that using a preconceived system of faith to interpret the Scriptures may create subjective deviations. (p.34)

⁴⁶ Leung Ka-lun, *Vision and Dedication* (Hong Kong: Alliance Press, 1995), p.95.

⁴⁷ Wang Ming-dao, "Why do I believe the Scriptures are inspired by God?" *Library of Wang Ming-dao* vol. 7, p.189.

⁴⁸ Most Chinese exegetes believe there is a unified plot in the Scriptures, and one of their tasks in exegesis is to discover this unified plot. Marcus Chen has proposed the following model:

1.	Genesis to Deuteronomy	revelation
2.	Joshua to Esther	preparation
3.	Job to Song of Solomon	aspiration
4.	Isaiah to Malachi	anticipation
5.	Matthew to John	epiphany
6.	Acts to epistles	praxis
7.	Revelations	completion

See Chan Sung-kwai, *Introduction to the Bible* (Hong Kong: Christian Communications, 1980), pp.2-3.

⁴⁹ Stephen C.T. Chan, *Interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures* (Hong Kong: Golden Lampstand, 1995), p.127.

⁵⁰ Wang Ming-dao, “Why do I believe that the Bible is inspired by God?” p.192.

⁵¹ Stephen Chan has criticized divergent spiritual interpretations. *Interpreting the Scriptures with Scriptures*, p.174.

⁵² John Sung, “Mystery of the Cross”, “Sermon Collections 1”, *Complete Collections of John Sung* vol. 1, pp.49-51.

⁵³ John Sung, “Journey into Canaan”, “Sermon Collections 1”, *Complete Collections of John Sung* vol. 1, pp.398-407.

⁵⁴ James Barr, *Escaping from Fundamentalism*, 37.

⁵⁵ See Kwok Wai-luen, “Spiritualization and Interpretation : A Study on Jia Yu-ming’s Hermeneutics”, in *Jian-dao* vol. 7 (Jan., 1997)

⁵⁶ The author has written an article about John Sung’s anti-intellectual thought. See Leung Ka-lun, “John Sung’s Teaching on Rebirth”, *Alliance Journal* vol. 4 (July, 1995), pp.1-15.

⁵⁷ John Sung, “Twelve Needs of Spiritual Workers of the Latter Days”, “Sermons Collections 3”, *Complete Collections of John Sung* vol. 3, p.345.

⁵⁸ He says, “Satan always asks us to exalt humans more than God. It wants us to neglect inspiration from the Holy Spirit through morning devotions, but to pay attention to magazines written by humans as well as to human words. Worshipping humans is poisonous and causes deviations in faith.” John Sung, “Distinguishing between Right and Wrong”, “Sermons Collections 3”, *Complete Collections of John Sung* vol. 3, p.338.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.337.

⁶⁰ Watchman Nee, “Ministry of the Word of God”, p.137.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.157.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.159.

⁶³ Lam Wing-hung points out succinctly in his appraisal of Watchman Nee’s exegetical method, “The Bible is only a medium to the understanding of God. The inspiration of the Bible together with the revelation of the Holy Spirit produce the word of God for today. The Bible is like a stepping stone into the revelation of God.

As there is the same psychological process working in everybody when revelation is obtained, the word obtained by spiritual persons from God today is naturally better than the Bible in its relevance and value.” Furthermore, this will create spiritual elitism, elevating the exegesis of certain spiritual persons above other believers. Lam Wing-hung, *The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee*, pp.286-287.

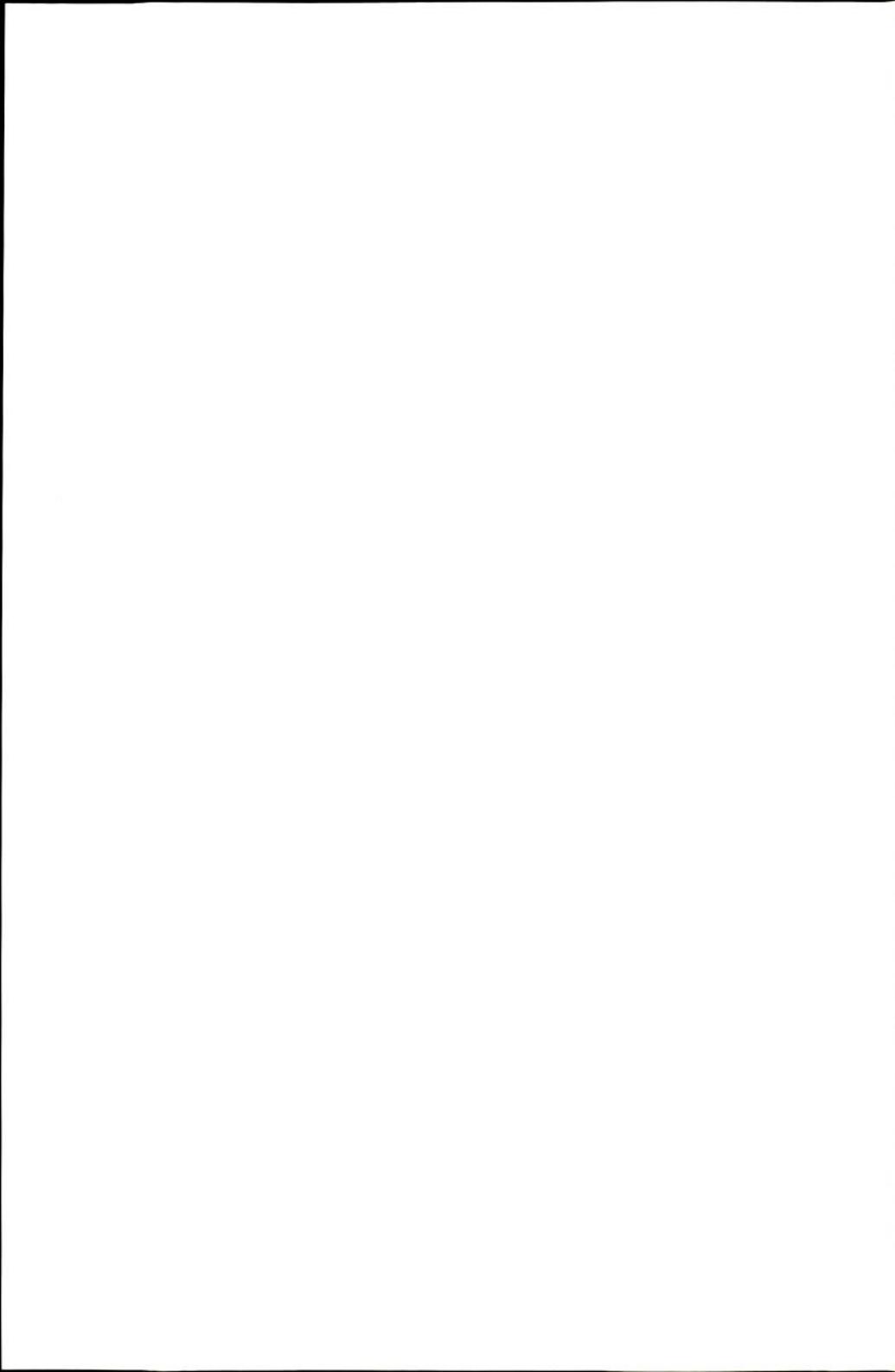
⁶⁴ Leung Ka-lun, “John Sung’s Teachings on Rebirth”, p.5.

⁶⁵ Liu Yi-ling, *Biography of John Sung* (Hong Kong: Christian Communications, 1963), pp.259-260.

⁶⁶ Stephen C.T. Chan, *My Uncle, Watchman Nee*, p.66.

⁶⁷ David H. Kelsey, “Protestant Attitudes regarding Methods of Biblical Interpretation”, 137.

⁶⁸ Kwong Ping-chiu has said, “Many scholars have criticized the fundamentalists in being too literal in interpreting the Scriptures and paying too little attention to the genre of the text. This deserves our awareness.” But he has not directly appraised the situation of the Chinese church. Kwong Ping-chiu, “Practical exegesis of the Old Testament”, Chan Tsai-man ed., *First Fruits: the Bible and Indigenous Theology* (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1979), p.26.



Response

Dr. Ted Zimmerman
Professor, Lutheran Theological Seminary
Hong Kong

First of all I would like to thank Dr. Leung Ka Lun for this thoughtful and thought-provoking paper. He issues a courageous and interesting call for a re-examination of the tradition in the history of Chinese Biblical interpretation that has been called "Spiritual Interpretation." Though he writes in defense of "Spiritual Interpretation," Dr. Leung is very balanced and thoughtful in his examination and evaluation of that tradition. Without question there is a need to thoughtfully re-evaluate and re-consider this tradition of biblical interpretation which has been so constitutive of the nature of the church in China instead of simply dismissing it out of hand as too individualistic and undisciplined to be taken seriously.

But there is no point in responding to Dr. Leung's paper if all I'm going to do is to agree with him about the importance of carefully re-thinking "Spiritual Interpretation." So, I have some questions and concerns that I would like to raise here in a brief, unorganized, and informal manner.

Dr. Leung correctly points out that allegorical interpretation, which he associates with Chinese "Spiritual Interpretation," is not a new phenomenon. It has been carried out since ancient times on various forms of literature, including Greek mythology. One common trait of interpretation in the Qumran community, Jewish midrash, Christian patristic 4-fold interpretation with its variants,

Protestant allegorical interpretation, and Chinese "Spiritual Interpretation" is a radical de-contextualization of the sacred text, or rather its re-contextualization from the context in which it arose to the context in which it is later interpreted. In its new context, the text need not mean what it once meant. Instead, it is seen as having always meant what it now means to the interpreter. The historical distance between text and interpreter evaporates in an interpretation which sees the text as meaning something very distant from what it may have ever meant in the past.

And Dr. Leung is also correct in noting that the motive force for Chinese spiritual interpretation, the reason for its existence, is the theological view-point which stands behind and under it. The fundamentalist theology of the Chinese spiritual interpreters is a vehicle that powers, steers, and controls a spiritual biblical interpretation. I am not sure, however, that I share Dr. Leung's confidence that we are therefore safe from heresy. Granted, a spiritual interpretation of scripture may not itself instigate heresy, but only because it plays a weak second fiddle to theology. In fact, the real danger is that such a domesticated spiritual interpretation may not be strong enough to prevent its theological master from heading off with it down the road to heresy. Such biblical interpretation cannot challenge or critique the controlling theological thought, and so may end up being only trivial window-dressing, interesting to look at, but with no real substance or force. Dr.

Leung himself raises this objection to spiritual interpretation on page 16 in the Chinese text (22 in the English), though I believe it points to more than just a valid criticism of spiritual interpretation. There may be great dangers in allowing biblical interpretation to become so toothless and docile in relation to theology.

It may be worth asking whether a post-modern hermeneutic should be so quickly dismissed as Dr. Leung does. Certainly, I agree with his comment in footnote number 6 dismissing some post-modern interpretation which thinks we have a “right” to ignore an author’s intention and freely create interpretations at will. I don’t think we have that right, either. But is Chinese spiritual interpretation actually very different from that? No, as Dr. Leung clearly points out, spiritual interpretation is not done at the whim of the interpreter. However, interpretation is created without regard for the original author’s intention or context under the necessity of fundamentalist theology. That may or may not be better than an arbitrary, “free-will” interpretation, but is it so fundamentally different?

Post-modern hermeneutics at its best seeks to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. It does not advocate that meanings should reside somewhere besides in the text itself. Rather, it observes that in reality meanings do change in relation to the context and situation of the interpreters. The post-modern world-view does not promote

relativism, but it does point out the plurality of meanings as a concrete condition of our world and it seeks to understand why this is so.

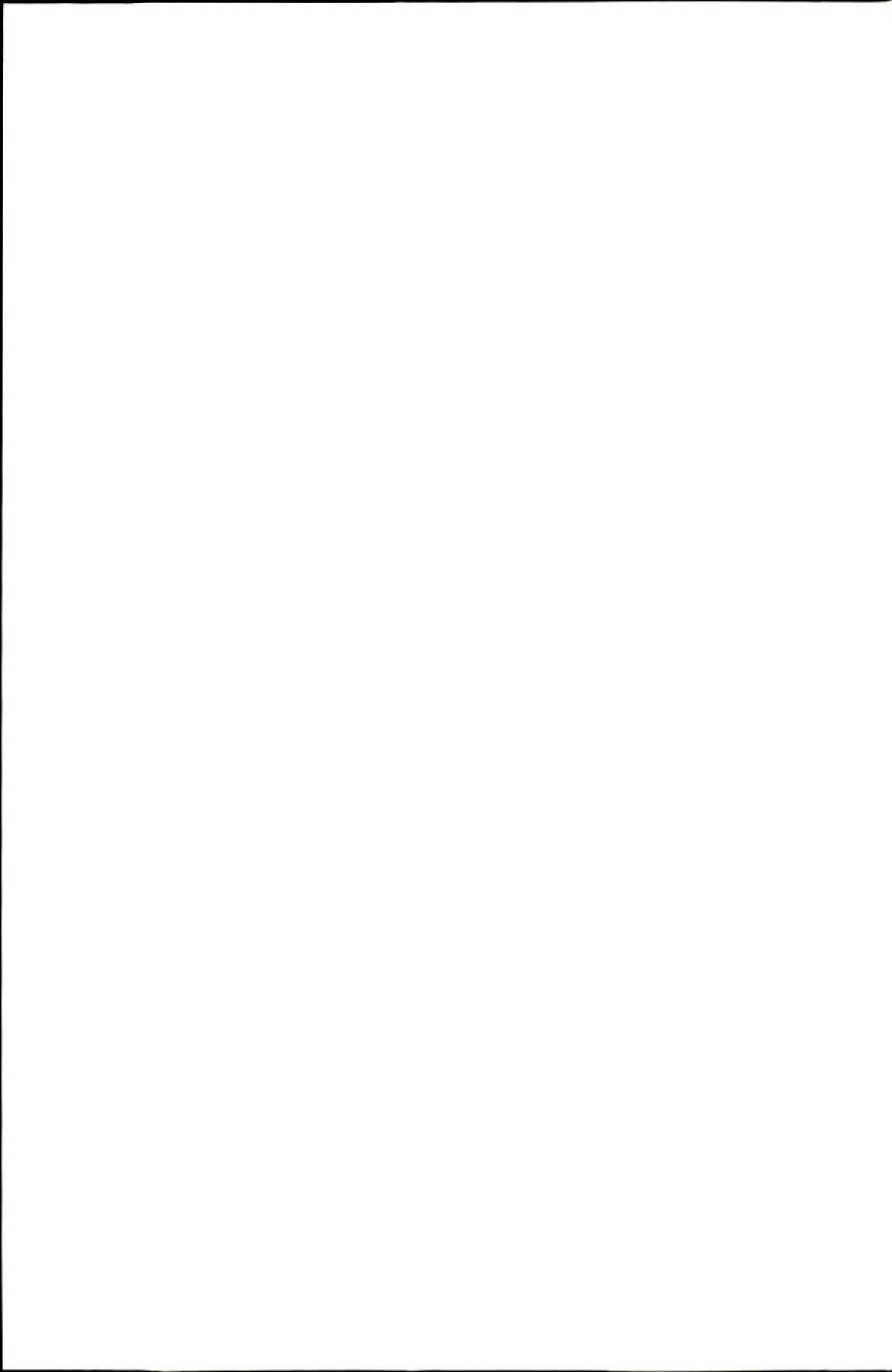
One tentative answer the post-modern hermeneutic offers is that meaning seems to be generated by forces that are not strictly bound by a text itself. Meaning is generated by a number of factors, most of which have to do with the world of the interpreter rather than with the text itself. This does not mean we have a "right" to make something mean anything we want it to, but it does mean that who we are, what we believe, and what we know, will of necessity have an effect upon what something means to us. Is not this very principle clearly illustrated in Chinese spiritual interpretation, where the prior belief in fundamentalist theology profoundly affects the meaning of the biblical text? The "engine" which generates meaning in Chinese spiritual interpretation of the Bible is not so much the texts themselves as the underlying fundamentalist theology of the interpreter and the need to preserve and defend this theology at all cost. Scripture can no longer mean what it says, since it must mean what the theology says it has to mean.

To be sure, Dr. Leung points out that some Chinese spiritual interpreters held the view that the original authors of the Bible really did intend the superficial meaning of the words of the text to hide the true, deeper, spiritual meaning which can only be understood by spiritual interpretation. Strictly speaking, then, this would be

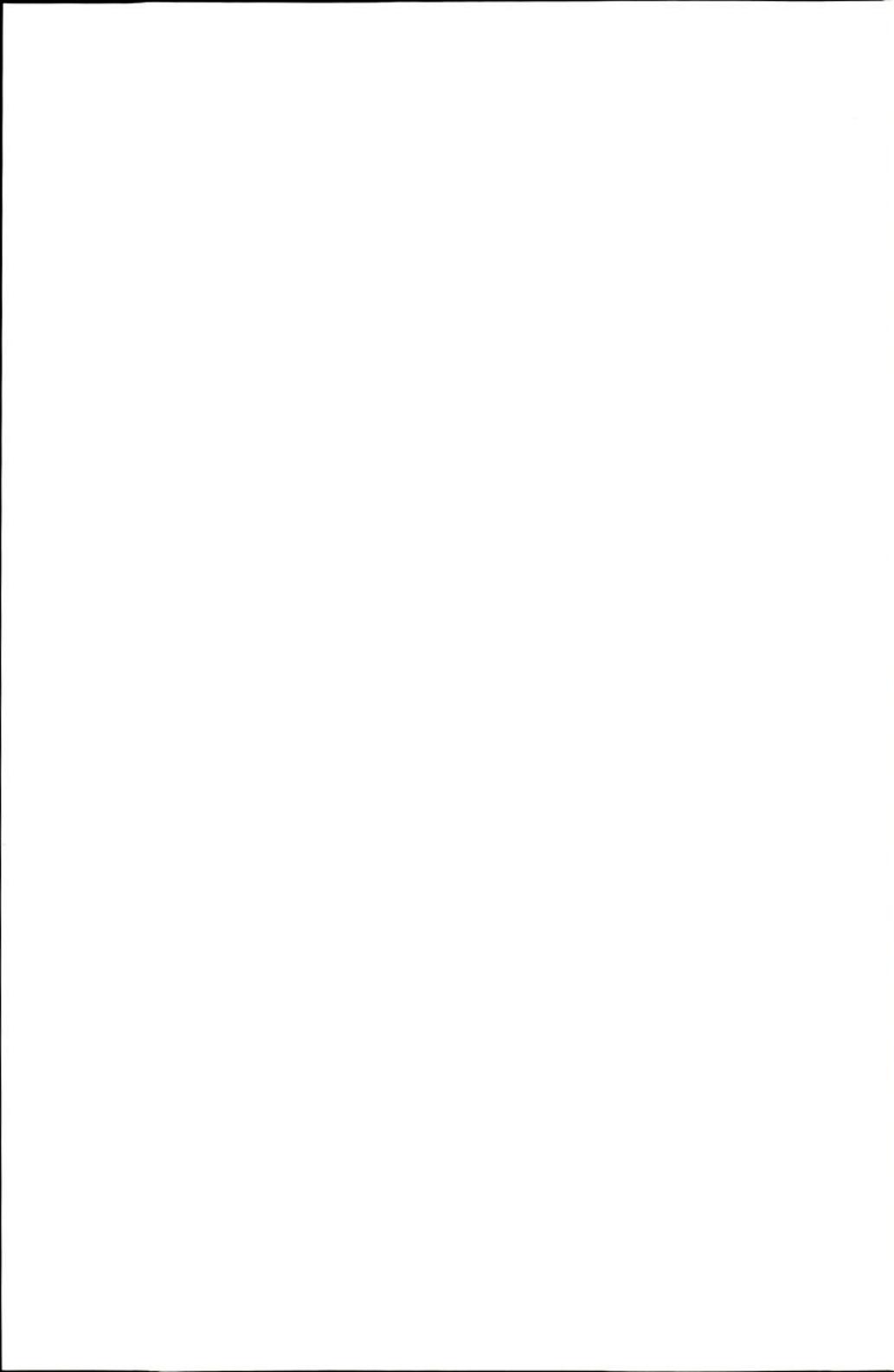
taking the author's intention seriously and interpreting in accordance with it. But one may be forgiven for asking, "Who gets to decide what hidden meanings the author really intended?" "Who gets to speak for God?" Now it really becomes a question of power and cunning rather than one of truth, does it not? When interpreters differ in their spiritual interpretations of the hidden, "spiritual" meaning of the text, who is to adjudicate between them? This is not, of course, a problem which is confined only to the spiritual interpreters; differences of opinion abound in any branch of biblical study and indeed of the church. But it does at the very least present a serious challenge to any claim to a "real, spiritual" interpretation of the hidden meaning of a particular text.

Chinese spiritual interpretation of the Bible has been and still is in some quarters a means of making the Bible come alive for ordinary Christians. It is this possibility which I think makes it worth looking at again. However, I believe it is important to look carefully at what truth-claims are being made about any particular spiritual interpretation. Claims to provide an infallible key to the "real" meaning of the Bible should arouse suspicion no matter what their source. On the other hand, I believe it is worthwhile to listen to a great variety of voices which offer possibilities for bringing people into meaningful, dynamic, and faithful encounter with the Bible.

I do not agree with Dr. Leung that the Old Testament is in danger of becoming irrelevant for the church without the aid of an allegorical or spiritual interpretation. Nor do I agree that such spiritual interpretation is completely without dangers, as I've mentioned above. But I do agree with his concern for the role of the Bible in the life of the church and I find considerable merit in his suggestion that Chinese spiritual interpretation should not be dismissed out of hand as a means to strengthen this role. Yet, I would also suggest caution in this endeavor, and constant mindfulness of the relationship between theology and biblical interpretation. If the Bible is to be Scripture for the church, it must continue to speak authoritatively and effectively to the church, critiquing and challenging its theological assumptions so that its theology does not wander down the paths of heresy or heterodoxy. To the extent that Chinese spiritual interpretation can strengthen the voice of the Bible in the church, I believe it is worth re-visiting, and I thank Dr. Leung for his helpful and competent guidance in making such a visit.



Section Three



**Reading Lamentations 1 in Light of *Qing-hèn*:
A Rhetorical Analysis from a Chinese Perspective**

Dr. Royan S. C. Yuen

I. Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to illustrate the significance of the reader or interpreter's subjectivity¹ in the process of reading or interpreting laments in the Bible. I attempt to provide a Chinese perspective in the following discussion. The Chinese perspective at issue is that of *qing-hèn*.² The text selected for study is Lam 1. The focus is on the development of the *qing-hèn* emotions in the lament.

A. Problem: A Shortcoming of the Study of Hebrew Laments

When people lament, they spontaneously vent their grievous emotions such as pain, grief, resentment, anger, regret, etc. Hebrew laments³ are not exceptions. These emotional elements are conveyed in the rhetoric⁴ used by the lamentors. These elements should be significant for understanding Hebrew laments because they are the primary forces⁵ that drive lamentors to lament and shape their products. In other words, the lamentors' emotional elements should be closely related to the rhetoric of the laments. A shortcoming of the study of Hebrew laments in today's biblical scholarship is the common neglect of the emotional elements conveyed in the rhetoric of laments. Scholars using historical critical methods seldom examine closely the emotional elements of the lamentors in their study of Hebrew laments.⁶ Trible summarizes James Muilenburg's criticisms on form criticism:

...traditional form criticism tends to fixate on conventions, slight historical commentary, separate form from content, isolate small units, and resist psychological and biographical interpretation. These criticisms pertain to the generalizing nature of the discipline. It neglects the individual, personal, unique, particular, distinctive, precise, versatile, and fluid features of the text.⁷

Besides the limitations of these methods, the neglect of the emotional elements in the study of laments may also be caused by an impression that any study dealing with the speaker's emotions in a biblical text is subjective. However, it is difficult for any interpreter of a text⁸ to remain absolutely objective, for when we interpret something, it will inevitably involve our subjective experience and perception. J. Severino Croatto rightly asserts: "No interpretation is innocent, flawlessly objective. An interpreted event is never objective."⁹ Yet, although it takes our subjective perception to feel the lamentors' emotions, critical study of the laments is possible because we are confined by the rhetoric of the given text and our interpretation is also disciplined by critical methods. So, while I use critical methods to study the *qing-hèn* elements and the speaker's emotional development in Lam 1, I will also allow my feelings and imagination to work simultaneously with the critical methods.¹⁰

In reference to the above discussion, the present study will contribute to biblical scholarship by demonstrating the significance of subjective factors such as the interpreter's intuition, feelings and imagination in reading and interpreting a biblical text, especially those pertinent to the genre of lament.

B. Concept of *Qing-hèn* in the Chinese Tradition

To use to the concept of *qing-hèn* in the reading of Hebrew laments, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of these two terms. First of all, neither of them has an exact English translation. Even in Chinese, their meanings are essentially untranslatable. However, the structure of the Chinese characters of these two words gives us a basic idea of their etymological senses.

1) The Meanings of *Qing*

Etymologically, the Chinese word 情 (*qing*) is a combination of the two component words: *xin* (心), meaning heart, and *qing* (青), meaning beauty, beautiful, green, young, or youthful. So, etymologically, *qing* (情) means good or beautiful heart;¹¹ and this good or beautiful heart ties someone to another person, an organization, a people, a country, or an object. Joseph *Wu*, a Chinese philosopher, distinguishes *qing* from the general notion of “love” which is the “affection and tenderness felt by lovers,” or the “affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interest.”¹²

(a) Extended Meanings of *Qing*

The distinct essence of *qing* is the deep solicitude originated from one’s heart.¹³ *Wu* quotes *Tang Junyi*:

So, the *qing* of the merciful father and mother of a family may just be confined to the family; the *qing* of the

philanthropists of a village may just be confined to the village. However, the *qing* of *Wen Tienxiang*¹⁴ lasts forever in China. The *qing* of Confucius, the Buddha, and Jesus reaches everywhere forever and ever.¹⁵

Wu also points out that *qing* extends beyond one's life. It continues between the living and the deceased,¹⁶ between those alive today and those who lived in the past. In addition, the Chinese also have *qing* for nature. They believe that nature has life and can give life, and are thus grateful for the protection and accommodation of heaven and earth. This tradition can be traced back to early Chinese civilization. In *Yijing*,¹⁷ it says: "the great benevolence of the heaven and earth is 'life' (天地之大德曰生); and "change" is life giving life (生生之謂易)." The Chinese believe that nature gives out life and they feel a unity with nature. Unlike western scientists, the Chinese seldom treat the nature merely as an object for study. They pay high respect to nature as a subject to which they are intimately related.¹⁸ That is why the Chinese have great respect and *qing* for the nature.¹⁹ Hence, in the Chinese tradition, *qing* is primarily in everyone and potentially for everyone and everything in the universe. At the epistemological level, the supreme state of *qing* that one has, according to *Wu*, is *gan tong* (感通; inner communion with various entities of the external world),²⁰ which may be for a friend, a historical figure, or an object in nature. *Li Shangyin*'s famous line best illustrates this subtle concept:

shen wu cai feng shuang fei yi, xin you lin xi yi dian tong.

身無彩鳳雙飛翼，心有靈犀一點通。

Although without the Wings of Phoenix we cannot come together, with Sacred Unicorn our two hearts join closely in rapport.²¹

At the level of inner unity, *qing* can actualize the hope for a harmonious world in which people are united in the concord of *qing*. This is “the loftiest *qing* of humankind,” which is an elegant expression of one’s spirituality²² in the Chinese culture.²³

(b) Significance of *Qing* in the Chinese Culture

The above brief analysis shows that *qing* is a distinct concept in the Chinese culture. Indeed, *qing* may be seen as the most valuable heritage in the Chinese tradition. *Wu* asserts:

Qing is the most valuable heritage in the Chinese tradition. There is *qing* for parents, *qing* for children, *qing* for brothers and sisters, *qing* for friends, *qing* for hometown, *qing* for country, *qing* for ancestor, *qing* for historical culture, and even *qing* for the nature It is the soul and spirit of the Chinese people. We must not let it vanish.²⁴

Wu’s assertion highlights that *qing* grows out of identity (e.g., a parent, a child, a spouse, a Chinese, an alumnus of a university, etc.) and relationships (e.g., parent and children, teacher and students, citizen and country, etc.). As *qing* grows out of various relational ties, it powerfully influences all segments of the Chinese communities. In addition, since *qing* extends even beyond the human horizon to the religious, ethical or philosophical level, it is a significant element in the Chinese culture expressing the spirituality of the Chinese people. Thus, *qing* provides a perspective for

understanding the spirituality of the Chinese people.

2) The Meanings of *Hèn*

Hèn (*han* in Korean)²⁵ is not a single emotion. It is an amalgamation of many emotions. *Jai Hoon Lee* so defines *hèn*:

Han is not a single feeling but many feelings condensed together, including resentment, regret, resignation, aggression, anxiety, loneliness, longing, sorrow, and emptiness.²⁶

Lee's definition implies that it is difficult to exhaust the meanings of *hèn*. So, in addition to the etymological sense of the term provided below, I will employ some illustrations to further illuminate its meanings.

Etymologically, the word 恨 (*hèn*) is also combined with two component words: *xin* (心; heart) and *gèn* (艮), which means “stiff, disobedient, sticky, perverse, or hardened.” So, the basic meaning of 恨 (*hèn*) is a hardened and bitter heart which falls short of passion. Both the words *qing* (情) and *hèn* (恨) have the same component word *xin* (心; heart), suggesting that they are somewhat mutually related. Indeed, it is true in reality. *Qing* and *hèn* are closely related and they mutually affect each other. Without the balance of *qing*, *hèn* may possibly go to an extreme. A typical example is the influence of *hèn* upon the culture and life of the Korean people.²⁷

On the other hand, the Chinese are far more influenced by *qing* than by *hèn*. The two stories below can help to illuminate the mutuality of *qing* and *hèn*. The following common Chinese sayings also reflect this phenomenon: (i) *jun zi bu nian jiu è* (君子不念舊惡; a true gentleman never recalls the offenses of others); (ii) *jun zi yi hé wei gui* (君子以和爲貴; the first concern of a true gentleman is to live in harmony with others); (iii) *fu ci zi xiao, xiong you di gong* (父慈子孝, 兄友弟恭; father loves his son and son honors his father; the older brother is kind to the younger one and the younger one respects the older one); and (iv) *yuan yuan xiang bao hé shi liao* (冤冤相報何時了; there is never an end to a repeated revenge). The above sayings indicate the constructive role that *qing* plays to reduce *hèn* in human conflicts and bring harmony to interpersonal relationships.

3) *Qing-hèn* and the Lamentor's Emotions

As explained above, *qing* and *hèn* are two terms used to describe a relatively wide range of emotions in the Chinese language. The emotions of *Qing* and *hèn* are not unique to the Chinese people; only the terms themselves are. When people lament, they often condense deep emotions together, such as grief, pain, regret, resentment, anger, anxiety, and emptiness etc. Such condensed deep emotions can be embraced under the term *hèn*.²⁸ Furthermore, since there are no English words that precisely translate the Chinese

terms *qing* and *hèn*,²⁹ their relatively inclusive meaning would leave more room for the readers' imagination and feelings as they are trying to understand the emotions of the lamentor. The concept of *qing-hèn* thus provides an alternative perspective to appreciate the emotional elements of Hebrew laments.

4) Lady *Meng*'s Story of *Qing-hèn*

In this section, I attempt to illustrate the concept as well as the dynamics of *qing-hèn* by reading the tragic story of Lady *Meng*. *Qing* and *hèn* are usually closely related that they can intensify or reduce each other.

The Chinese history contains more than four thousand years of imperial rule. People's fate and well-being are totally at the mercy of the ruling class. Even a virtuous emperor or official can be very oppressive, and the severity of oppression by tyrants is often beyond our imagination. Oppression causes *hèn*. The story of Lady *Meng* (孟姜女; *Meng Jian Nu*) powerfully protests against such oppression and expresses people's *hèn*. It is also noted that *hèn* can be drastically intensified by *qing*:

This happened in the reign of the wicked, unjust Emperor *Ch'in Shih Huang-ti*. He was afraid at this time that the Huns would break into the country from the north and not leave him any peace. In order to keep them in check, he decided to build a wall along the whole northern frontier of China. But no sooner was one piece built than another fell down, and the wall made no progress. Then a wise (!) man said to him: 'A wall

like this, which is over ten thousand miles long, can be built only if you immure a human being in every mile of the wall. Each mile will then have its guardian.' It was easy for the Emperor to follow this advice, for he regarded his subjects as so much grass and weeds, and the whole land began to tremble under this threat.

Plans were then made for human sacrifice in great numbers. At that last minute 'an ingenious scholar' suggested to the Emperor that it would be sufficient to sacrifice a man called *Wan* 'since *Wan* means ten thousand.' Soldiers were dispatched at once to seize *Wan* who was sitting with his bride at the wedding feast. He was carried off by the heartless soldiers, leaving Lady *Meng*, his bride, in tears.

Eventually, heedless of the fatigue of the journey, she traveled over mountains and through rivers to find the bones of her husband. When she saw the stupendous wall she did not know how to find the bones. There was nothing to be done, and she sat down and wept. Her weeping so affected the wall that it collapsed and laid bare her husband's bones. When the Emperor heard of *Meng Chiang* and how she was seeking her husband, he wanted to see her himself.

When she was brought before him, her unearthly beauty so struck him that he decided to make her Empress. She knew she could not avoid her fate, and therefore she agreed on three conditions. First, a festival lasting forty-nine days should be held in honor of her husband; second, the Emperor, with all his officials, should be present at the burial; and third, he should build a terrace forty-nine feet high to her husband *Ch'in Shi Huang-ti* granted all her requests at once.

When everything was ready she climbed on to the terrace and began to curse the Emperor in a loud voice for all his cruelty and wickedness. Although this made the Emperor very angry, he held his peace. But when she jumped from the terrace into the river, he flew into a rage and ordered his soldiers to cut up her body into little pieces and grind her bones to powder. When they did this, the little pieces changed into little silver fish, in which the soul of faithful *Meng Chiang* lives for ever.³⁰

The above story of the poor Lady *Meng* reveals some concrete ways in which *hèn* is created and developed. The root cause of it is the emperor's relentless oppression of his people. He snatched away Lady *Meng*'s newly married husband, *Wan*, in the middle of their wedding feast. Lady *Meng* was so driven by her *qing* for her husband that she went to extremes to travel afar, searching only for the bones of her husband.³¹ Her wall-collapsing weeping was the expression of her pent-up *hèn*, which had been intensified by her *qing* for her husband. Her *hèn* was even more drastically magnified by the emperor's forced proposal. It was fully vented in her loud curse on him in front of all his officials. The bold final act of Lady *Meng* was motivated partly by her *hèn* over the wicked emperor, and partly by her allegiance to her deceased husband. Although Lady *Meng* was powerless before the merciless emperor, the spirit of her faithful soul lives in eternity and her cry of *hèn* against his cruelty lingers eternally.

In the inner world of many Chinese, *hèn* creates a vacuum that can never be filled. In classical Chinese, there is a term *hèn hai* (恨海; the sea of *hèn*) which signifies the deep and lingering pain of *hèn*. There is an ancient Chinese myth about the unfillable hole of *hèn*:

The daughter of *Yan Di* (炎帝, Emperor *Yan*)³² was drowned in *Dong Hai* (東海, the East Sea) and became a bird called *Jing Wei* (精衛). She carried the wood and stones from *Xi Shan* (西山; the West Mountain) in an attempt to fill the sea where she was drowned. Tragically, her goal was never fulfilled. So, the sea was called *hèn hai* (恨海).³³

The unfillable hole of *hèn* itself is *hèn* because it continues to cause *hèn* emotions.

Lady *Meng*'s heartbreakng story indicates the spiritual dimension of *qing-hèn*. Her *qing* for her enslaved and murdered husband, *Wan*, motivated and sustained her to seek his bones throughout the painful and fruitless journey. Such *qing* of a wife for her husband is presumed in the Chinese culture.³⁴ On the other hand, Lady *Meng*'s *hèn* over the untimely death of her husband and the cruelty of *Ch'in Shi Huang-ti* is *yi hèn* (義恨; *hèn* of righteousness). Her *yi hèn* echoes the *hèn* of all those who are oppressed by a merciless tyrant. Such *yi hèn* originated from the tyranny of the wicked emperor and her *qing* for her ill-fated husband. On the contrary, the *hèn* of *Ch'in Shi Huang-ti* over Lady *Meng* is *è hèn* (惡恨; *hèn* of evil). His *è hèn* is indicated in his act to order his soldiers to cut Lady *Meng*'s body into little pieces and grind her bones to powder. However, the relentless emperor's *è hèn* cannot extinguish Lady *Meng*'s *yi hèn*. The cut-up pieces of her body changed into little silver fish, in which her soul lives forever.

C. Methods

The methods that I apply to the reading of Lam 1 are pertinent to the category of rhetorical criticism. The rhetorical method used here reflects a major focus on the rhetorical or stylistic devices in the text.

1) Rhetorical Criticism Focusing on Rhetorical Devices

The primary focus of the study is the “rhetorical style” of a biblical text, which is also known as stylistic criticism. Its purpose is to discern the rhetorical or stylistic devices in a text, such as words used, syntactical structure, structural pattern, sounds, rhyme and rhythm, figures of speeches, and images etc.³⁵ Since these devices are what a lamentor deliberately uses to compose his lament as a rhetorical piece, they should carry the marks of his emotions.

2) Identifying *Qing-hèn* in Hebrew Laments

I have mentioned above that besides the defined critical methods employed, we need to use our intuition, feeling and imagination to appreciate the emotional elements in a lament. These emotional elements are the human passion in Hebrew poetry that C. S. Song talks about.³⁶ From a Chinese perspective, such human passion can be categorized as *qing-hèn*. Song articulates that we cannot read what is written in the Bible without feeling the human passion in it:

.... You cannot read psalms in the Old Testament without feeling human passion bursting out of them. You cannot read many stories in the Bible without being affected by the human passion crying out to heaven. And you cannot read the accounts of Jesus' life and work in the New Testament without sensing that human passion is about to tear open the womb of the earth³⁷

Such passionate elements are beyond the reach of merely empirical

or postulational approaches. They can only be reached by the heart. This is an intuitive approach to the perception of reality. However, the intuitive “heart” approach of doing theology does not necessarily flaunt emotionalism on the one hand and devalue rationalism on the other. Defending readers’ subjective involvement in the biblical text during the reading and interpreting process, Croatto articulates:

The reading of the Bible would appear to become subjective, with little foundation in the Bible itself, paradoxically. But I think that what happens is just the opposite. The imputation of “subjectivity” lodged against biblical hermeneutics would in that case be valid with respect to all theology, inasmuch as there is no such thing as an “objective” theology. Not even an academic exegesis can be such.³⁸

On the other hand, to do biblical study is to work with a given biblical text. The text, which is a record of the rhetoric the author uses, conditions the interpretation. As Croatto says, “A text says what it permits [*sic.* is permitted] to say.”³⁹ So, to identify *qing-hèn* in the laments and investigate the lamentor’s emotional development, I will apply the rhetorical critical method which focuses on the rhetoric or stylistic devices. At the same time, I will cautiously allow my intuition, feelings and imagination to work as well.

3) Limitations

The present study will be confined to the issues discussed above. I will not attempt to provide a thorough commentary on Lam 1. The translation of the Hebrew texts is my own unless

otherwise noted. My translation of Lam 1 will follow the Masoretic Text closely. This is the reason why the syntax of some translated sentences look strange. The transliteration of Chinese characters will follow the *pinyin* system. However, the transliteration in the sources which follow other systems will be preserved.

II. Reading Lamentations 1 in Light of *Qing-hèn*

A. Theological Affiliation of Lamentations

To read Lam 1 in light of *qing-hèn*, it is necessary to understand the historical background of this lament and the theological affiliation of the lamentor.⁴⁰ Such understanding will help us to better comprehend the relationship between the lamentor and what he laments for; as well as his *qing-hèn* as expressed in the lament.

It is generally agreed that the book of Lamentations was prompted by the catastrophe of Zion, which symbolizes the temple and the holy city.⁴¹ The catastrophe devastated the people of Israel from all walks of life. The lamentor laments for these people as one of them who has gone through the devastating affliction. In a recent study, I. G. P. Gous holds that Lamentations is written by the “poets who remained adherents of the theology of Zion.”⁴² As indicated below, the frequent occurrences of the term *yrš*⁴³ in Lamentations do imply the association of the lamentor with the circle of the Zion traditions. The recognition of the lamentor’s theology is significant to the understanding of his *qing-hèn* because, in the Zion traditions, Yahweh and Israel are in close relation and this tie engenders deep *qing* between them. This notion will be followed in the reading of Lam 1 below.

Furthermore, it is widely held that the lamentor of the book of Lamentations is likely someone who experienced the trauma of the catastrophic devastation in 587 B.C. As his laments indicate, he identifies himself with the suffering people of Israel and shared their *hèn*. From the perspective of *qing-hèn*, this bond is *qing*, which amplifies his *hèn*—the grievous and resentful emotions that he expresses in the laments. In other words, the *qing-hèn* of the lamentor echoes that of the people of Israel in response to their catastrophic devastation in the fall of Jerusalem.

B. Commentary

In Lam 1, there are explicitly two speaking voices, the lamentor's narrating voice and Zion's voice, which is the lamentor's *persona*. The narrating voice appears in vv.1-9b, 10-11b and 17, while Zion's voice in vv.9c, 11c-16 and 18-22.⁴⁴ The study below will follow the two speaking voices in this lament.

1) Vv.1-9b

The narrating voice describes the heart-breaking scenes of Zion's devastation as if showing a series of slides to the audience:

Verse	Theme
1.	Zion's desolated present contrasts with her glorious past.
2.	Zion weeps bitterly and has no comforter.
3.	Suffering of Zion's people in exile.

4. Zion's total desolation—the holy city and people.
5. The enemy's prevalence is Yahweh's punishment.
6. Zion's glory, people and strength are all gone.
7. Zion's precious things are gone and she has no helper but mockers.
8. Zion's sins bring her mockery, shame and groans.
- 9a-b Zion has no hope and no comforter.

The beginning exclamatory adverb **אֵיכָה**, a marker of Hebrew elegy, sets the dirge tone of the lament.⁴⁵ This adverbial particle signifies that the dreadful loss of the holy city is like someone's death. Death is something irreversible and would cause tremendous *hèn*. This is a cry of *hèn* that initiates the portrayal of the contrast between Zion's past and present.⁴⁶

אֵיכָה יִשְׁבָּה בָּרֶךְ	v.1	How she dwells in isolation,
הַשִּׁיר רֶבֶת עַם		the city (once) of many people!
הַרְחִיתָה כָּלְמָבֵדָה		She has become like a widow,
כָּבָתִי בְּנָוִים		(once) great among the nations;
שָׁבְרִית בְּמִדְרָעָות		a princess (once) among the provinces,
הַרְחִיתָה לְמַסָּה		has become a forced laborer.

Once populous, she now sits alone; once a noble lady, she is now like a widow; once a princess, now a forced laborer. The expression **בָּרֶךְ יִשְׁבָּה** formulates an irony with the initial **לְבָתִי**⁴⁷ and articulates personified Zion's miserable position concerning her relation to the other nations—she sits there in loneliness like a widow. In ancient Israelite society, the status of a widow was regarded as a divine reproach (cf. Ruth 1:19-21; Isa 54:4).⁴⁸ Widowhood brings women both pain and shame (Gen 38:14). Widowhood itself is *hèn* and generates more and greater *hèn*. This is a strong articulation of the *hèn* of the suffering people of

Israel because it is a tragic reality that they cannot avoid or reverse. The imagery that Zion “weeps bitterly at night” with “her tears on her cheeks” (v.2) pictures her deep *hèn* over being betrayed and deserted by her friends and lovers. As the text implies, this *hèn* is forged by her faithlessness and frivolity.⁴⁹ Her *hèn* is so deep that it keeps her from sleeping at night. She cannot sleep but weeps bitterly. The tears remain wet on her cheeks.

In vv.3-4, the narrator describes the devastation of Zion in more concrete terms:

בָּלְתָה יְהוּדָה מָעֵן וּמְרַב עֲבֹרָה הִיא יָשָׁבָה בָּנָיוֹם לֹא מִצְאָה קָנָתָה כָּל-רוֹדְפָה הַשִּׁׁינּוֹת בֵּין הַמִּצְרִים	v.3	Judah has gone into exile because of affliction, and because of harsh servitude; she dwells among the nations, finding no rest; and all her pursuers overtake her amidst the narrows.
דְּרַכֵּי צִיּוֹן אֲבָלּוֹת כָּבֵל בָּאִי מִתְּנָדָר כָּל-שְׁעִירָה שׁוֹמְמִין כָּתָנָה נָאָנָהִים בְּחֹלְתִּיקָה נָוָתָה וְהִיא פָּרָלָה	v.4	The ways of Zion are mourning because no one comes to the feast; all her gates are desolate; her priests are groaning; her maidens are dragged off; she is bitter for herself.

The people of Israel are left in *hèn* because: (i) they are dominated by their enemies and they are helpless and powerless in face of such oppression; (ii) they do not have anyone to comfort them, not even Yahweh; and (iii) the holy city and her people are devastated. Seeing such irreversible tragic scenes, even the ways of Zion mourn.

The mourning ways of Zion is another powerful imagery reflecting the deep *hèn* of Israel. Even the lifeless ways leading to Zion mourn for such “tragic reversal.” The *hèn* over such a tragedy would be overwhelming for any human.

In the middle of this narration, the narrator plainly points out that the tragedy was a consequence of Zion’s trespasses:

הִי צְרִיךְ לְרֹאשׁ
אָבִיהָ שָׁלוֹ
כִּי־יְהִי הַזָּהָר
עַל רַב־בְּשִׁעַרִים
שְׁלִילִית הַלְּכָה
שָׁבֵן לְפָנֵיךְ

v.5 Her adversaries have become the chief,
her enemies are at ease;
for Yahweh has afflicted her
on account of her many transgressions;
her children have gone into captivity
before the adversary.

A similar statement of the narrator is seen in v.8a:

חַטָּאת חַטָּאת יְרוּשָׁלָם
עַל־כָּן לִנְיָה הַנִּתְחַה

v.8a Grievously has Jerusalem sinned,
therefore an object of mockery she has
become;

The above two statements by the lamentor echo the *hèn* of Zion and her people over their sins that have led to the great irreversible tragedy. The confession provides the suffering people of Israel with a theological explanation for the fall of Jerusalem. After all, however, there is nothing they can do to reverse the tragedy but regret it in deep *hèn*.

The narrator continues the description of Zion’s devastation in v.6. One of the results of the fall of Jerusalem is the total loss of her glory and prosperity (vv.6a, 7a-b):

מִן בְּחִצֵּין v.6a Gone from daughter Zion
 קָל-תְּהִרָּה הִיּוּ is all her splendor;

וּבָרָה יְרוּשָׁלָם v.7a-b Jerusalem remembers
 שְׁנָה וּמְרוּעָה the days of her affliction and her
 wandering,
 קָל מְהֻמְדָה אֲשֶׁר all her precious things which
 הִיּוּ מִימֵי קָדָם were from the days of old.

This is also part of the “tragic reversal.”⁵⁰ The reminiscence of Zion’s past glory indicates the lamentor’s *qing* for Zion and her daughter people.⁵¹ Comparing Zion’s glorious past with her devastated and shameful present only arouses the lamentor’s *hèn*. His *qing* for Zion intensifies his *hèn*.

In the development of the narration in vv.1-9b, the devastating scenes described in vv.7-9b should have strong emotional impact on the lamentor who speaks in the *persona* of Zion.⁵² She loses all her precious things (v.7b), she is shamed (vv.7d, 8a-b, 9a), and she has no helper or comforter (vv.7c, 9b). Each of these pictures is heart-breaking. They stir up the *hèn* of the narrator and his audience. Zion’s sudden appearance in v.9c indicates her deep, pent-up grievous emotions. Her *hèn* builds up to a point that she can no longer control them. She breaks down and the narration is interrupted in v.9c.

2) Vv.9c-11c

רָאָה יְהוָה אֶת-עַנְיִן v.9c Look. O Yahweh, my affliction,
 כִּי הַנְּדִיל אָרוּבָן for the enemy has become great!

נָדָר פָּרָשׁ אָצָר v.10 The adversary has stretched out his

על כל-מִתְמִירָה	hand
כִּי רָאָה נַעֲמָם	upon all her precious things;
בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁה	Indeed, she saw the nations;
אֲשֶׁר צִוְּתָה	they entered into her sanctuary,
לֹא יָבֹא בְּקָהָל לְךָ	those whom you commanded not to enter your assembly
כָּל-עַמָּה נָגַנְתָּם	v.11 All her people groan,
מְבַקְשִׁים לְחֵם	those who are seeking bread;
נָתְנָה מִתְמֻדְּרָהָם בְּאַכְלָה	they have given up their treasures for food
לְהַשִּׁיב נָפְשָׁה	in order to restore (their) life.
רָאָה יְהָוָה וְבִיטָּה	Look, O Yahweh, and see,
כִּי קִיּוֹת וּלְלָהָה	for I have become a frivolous woman.

In v.9c, Zion interrupts the narration and grievously pleads with Yahweh: “Look, O Yahweh, my affliction, ...”⁵³ The interruption and the momentary resumption of the narrating voice are rhetorically devised to articulate the immeasurable grievous emotions of Zion which she cannot control; she cries out to Yahweh for help.⁵⁴ This imagery powerfully conveys the profound *hèn* of Zion, who symbolizes the suffering people of Israel.

Rhetorically, Zion’s abrupt address to Yahweh in v.9c is an apostrophe. Similar rhetorical device is used in 11c, 12a and 20a. Apostrophe means “the orator suddenly breaks off to address someone or something.”⁵⁵ Alonso-Schökel regards it as “the very essence of oratory.”⁵⁶ Indeed, apostrophe is a rhetorical device commonly used to enhance the effectiveness of a discourse and arouse the attention of the audience:

... Apostrophe is rhetorical when one of its elements is unexpected, either because, in a narrative, the process of enunciation is made explicit by means of a second-person pronoun designating the reader; or because, in a discourse, some general truth is addressed specially to the attention of the listeners; or because the author pretends to address absent persons, ideas, or objects.⁵⁷

Apostrophe is widely used in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isa 49:12-13; 6 Jer 2:11-12; Zech 2:17; Nah 2:9; Ps 58:7; 137:4-5). It is a rhetorical device for emphasis.⁵⁸ Alonso-Schökel points out the relatively common phenomenon where the psalmist suddenly turns his words to God in an apostrophe:

In the Psalms the words are normally directed to God, or to the assembly, inviting them to praise. It is not abnormal that the psalmist should suddenly turn his words to God in an apostrophe⁵⁹

This phenomenon is also common in Hebrew laments (e.g., Ps 6:2; 13:2; 22:2; 35:2, 17; 38:2, 10; 42:2b; 43:1; 60:12; 76:7; 79:5; 102:13; 109:22; Isa 63:14b; Jer 14:7, 19; 20:12; Hab 1:12).

3) Vv.11c-16

After the narrator resumes his voice in v.10a and speaks through v.11b, Zion speaks in v.11c, apostrophizing Yahweh again. As a result, the two apostrophes in vv.9c and 11c parenthesize and highlight vv.10-11b, where the narration develops to a climax—the enemies intruding the sanctuary (上帝) ⁶⁰ of Yahweh, the overlord of Zion, and the people of Zion suffering from famine. Both apostrophes here carry the force of articulating Zion's *hèn*. When

Zion apostrophizes to Yahweh, she appeals to her *ethos* as Yahweh's glorious kingly abode and his protégé, in regards to the Zion traditions. In Lam 1, Zion apostrophizes Yahweh three times, pleading with him for compassion (vv.9c, 11c, 20a):

ראה יהוה אֶחָדָנִי כִּי הַנְּדִיל אֹיֵב	v.9c	Look. O Yahweh, my affliction, for the enemy has become great!
ראה יהוה וְהַבִּיטָה כִּי הַיְיִתִי זָלָלה	v.11c	Look, O Yahweh, and see, for I have become a frivolous woman.
ראה יהוה כִּי־צָרָלִי מַעַי חַפְרָמָרוֹ	v.20a	Behold, O Yahweh, the distress I have— my bowels are churning;

These apostrophes are also rhetorical devices expressing Zion's *hèn*. Her *hèn* is her feelings of distress, frustration and helplessness in face of the reality of what she has become (זָלָלה), a frivolous woman (v.11c), a big contrast to what she should be.⁶¹

Both Zion's daughter people and her overlord were intimidated by the intruding enemies. Her *qing* for these people deepens her *hèn* over their suffering (v.18c). There are several places in this poem where Zion's intimate relationship with the people of Israel is revealed. This is her *qing* for the suffering people of Israel. Such deep *qing* is revealed in the expressions that regard the devastated holy city and the suffering people of Israel as "her own": "her gates, her priests, her maidens" (v.4), "her children" (v.5), "her princes" (v.6), "her people" (v.7), "her sanctuary" (v.10), "my young one" (v.15), "my sons" (v.16), "my young women and young men" (v.18),

“my priests and my elders” (v.19). Such deep *qing* greatly intensifies her *hèn*:

Behold, O Yahweh, the distress I have—
my bowels are churning; (v.20a)

This is another example showing the intensifying effect of *qing* upon *hèn*. As discussed above, the imagery of Zion’s churning bowels invites us to imagine how great her *qing* for the people of Israel and her *hèn* over their devastation. Her deep pounding wails channel her great *hèn* of being too powerless and helpless to reverse the insurmountable shame and devastation induced by the enemies. As a matter of fact, the great shame and pain of being intruded and devastated themselves are *hèn*.

On the other hand, Zion confesses that her sins cause the afflictions she suffers (vv.12-15, 18a). She vividly describes how she has been deeply troubled by her own transgressions in v.14a and b:

וְשָׁקֵד עַל	v.14-a-b	The yoke kept vigilant; ⁶² my transgressions were intertwined by its power—
פְּשָׁעִי בַּיּוֹד יְשַׁתְּרֹג		they (transgressions) climbed up upon my neck;
עַל־עַל־צְוֹאָרִי		it (the yoke) caused my strength to fail.
הַכְשִׁיל כְּחִי		

Zion is heavily burdened by her sins. Her transgressions are like a yoke climbing upon her neck and cause her strength to fail. Even so, she cannot help venting her *hèn* over Yahweh’s *wuqing* (無情; relentlessness). She details Yahweh’s relentless punitive actions

against her (vv.13, 14c, 15) out of his anger (v.12c): (i) Yahweh has set a fire on her (v.13a); (ii) Yahweh has caused her to stumble by spreading a net for her feet (v.13b); (iii) Yahweh has made her desolate and sick (v.13c); (iv) Yahweh has placed her into the hand of an irresistible enemy (v.14c); (v) Yahweh has shamed her mighty ones; and (vi) Yahweh has crushed her young one and trampled her like a wine-press (v.15b-c). Zion's *hèn* over such excessive and merciless punishment is rhetorically articulated in her apostrophe to all the passers-by in v.12:

לוֹא אֲלֵיכֶם כָּל־עַבְרִי דָּרְךָ	v.12	May this (fate) not be yours, all you passers-by!
הַבִּינוֹ וְרֹאֵ		Look and see.
אָסֹשֶׁ מִכְאָבֶכֶם כִּמְכָאָבֶ		Is there any pain like my pain, which has been inflicted on me,
אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַל לִי		that Yahweh carried off
אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּה יְהֻדָּה		in the day of his fierce anger?
בַּיּוֹם חֶרְזֵן אָפָּוּ		

Zion is overwhelmed by her deep *hèn* over “these things.” In v.16a, her such deep *hèn* is utterly illuminated in her sobs with catches and breaks in her voice:

עַל־אֱלֹהָה אֲנִי בּוֹכֵה	v.16a	Because of these things, I cried;
עַנֵּי עַנֵּי יְרֻךָ פָּוּם		My eye, ... my eye, tears come down.

I disagree that the repeated occurrence of *שַׁיִן* is a dittography. This is an artistic style to express Zion's sobs with catches and breaks in her voice.⁶³

In tears, Zion complains that the comforter is distant from her. The theme that Zion has no comforter occurs five times in Lam 1

(vv.2, 9, 16, 17 and 21). Here, we need to clarify who Zion's lovers, friends, comforter, and helper are. The terms “lovers” (אֶחָדִים; vv.2 and 19) and “friends” (רַبִּים; v.2) should be treated as synonymy. The plural of these two terms implies the infidelity of Zion. In view of the theme of impurity in this poem (vv.8, 9, 11), the “lovers” or “friends” of Zion probably refer to the foreign deities and the political allies of Israel. On the other hand, with the exception of v.16, both terms שְׁנָה (v.7) and שְׁנָה (vv.2, 9, 16, 17, 21) are preceded by the particle נַא (no one or none), telling of the reality that Zion has been abandoned by both her false lovers and Yahweh. The term שְׁנָה in v.16b should refer to Yahweh since he is the one who restores Zion's life.⁶⁴ Such a cruel reality adds even more *hèn* to Zion for two reasons: (i) she regrets that she has relied on the wrong friends and lovers. Those who seemed to love her have never helped her or comforted her (vv.7c, 9b, 17a, 21a) and even Yahweh seemed to have abandoned her (v.16b).⁶⁵ Their *wuqing* hurts her deeply and adds much to her *hèn*; and (ii) Zion has to bear the severe consequences of her mistakes. An immediate consequence is Yahweh's being distant from her. That is why her *hèn* is so deep that she sobs with catches and breaks in her voice (v.16a). The root שְׁנָה is frequently used to describe Yahweh's comforting his people in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ps 86:17; Isa 22:4; 40:1; 49:3; 51:3, 19; 52:9; 61:12; 66:13; Jer 31:13; Lam 1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21; 2:13; Zech 1:17); but in Lamentations, Yahweh is the absent comforter of Zion. This theme is exemplified in vv.17a and 21a.

It is noted that the suffering scenes mentioned by Zion in Lam 1 all appear for the first time before v.16. Each of these scenes is *hèn* and triggers *hèn*. Zion's *hèn* thus comes to a boiling point in this verse.⁶⁶ Such deeply intensified *hèn* is reflected in her mournful sobs and tears. These scenes add to her grief and draw more tears as pictured by the Chinese saying *xin ru dao ge* (心如刀割; the heart is pierced as if by a knife). That is why she mourns grievously with sobs and tears for the “tragic reversal.”

4) V.17

In v.17a, the lamentor shifts back to his narrating voice. The shift provides a timely pause for Zion who is sobbing with catches and breaks. From a third person's viewpoint, the lamentor vividly pictures Zion's *hèn* deep down in her heart:

פְּרַשָּׁה צִיּוֹן בִּנְדִיבָה v.17a Zion spread out her hands,
אֵין מִנְחָם לָהּ she had no comforter;

The imagery that Zion spreads out her hands vainly for her comforter expressively conveys her *hèn* of being deserted by her comforter. The lamentor resumes the theme of “tragic reversal” in v.17c, setting the stage for Zion to further express her *hèn* of having been rebellious against Yahweh and of being overly punished by him in the last sections (vv.18-22).

5) Vv.18-20

In vv.18a and 20b, Zion confesses that all her devastation is caused by her rebellion against Yahweh:

כִּי פָרָהו קָרִיתִי v.18a ...because his word I have rebelled against;

כִּי פָרָה קָרִיתִי v.20b ...because I have rebelled grievously;

The confessions convey the deep *hèn* of Zion over her sins that have led to the irreversible tragedy encountered by her daughter people. There are two Chinese poetic lines that best describe such irreversible faults:

yi shi zu cheng qian gu hèn; hui tou yi shi bai nian shen.
一失足成千古恨; 回頭已是百年身。

Even a single fault can become perpetual *hèn*; as one looks back and sees the committed fault like nothing but a statue of hundred years of age.

Zion's confessions indicate her grave *hèn* over her transgressions that have resulted in the dreadful consequence (vv. 18a, 20b; also vv. 11c, 12-15) she cannot change. In her apostrophe to Yahweh in v.20a, Zion appeals to her *ethos* as his protégé. The appeal effectively vents her *hèn* over the irreversible tragic reality: all her past glory and *shalom* have perished and she is left in deep *hèn*—grievous pain and distress. Had Zion not transgressed, she would have maintained a close relationship with Yahweh, her overlord, and enjoyed the promised *shalom*. According to Ps 25:14, the friendship of Yahweh is for those who fear him and observe his covenant:

Ps 25:14

סוד יהוה ליראיו

ובריתו להודיעם:

The friendship of Yahweh is for
those who fear him;
and his covenant they make
known to themselves.

Therefore, Zion's apostrophe to Yahweh, pleading with him to see her great distress and churning bowels, underscores the *hèn* of her broken relationship with Yahweh. However, although she agrees that she deserves punishment for her transgressions, it by no means reduces her *hèn* of having been so severely punished. Thus, she vents her pent-up *hèn* in the closing section of this poem.

6) Vv.21-22

Lam 1 closes with Zion's plea for Yahweh's just punishment for her enemies. She reveals her pent-up *hèn* over Yahweh and her enemies. In v.21b, she expresses such emotion to Yahweh in a rather accusatory tone:

V.21b all my enemies heard of my trouble;
they rejoiced because you have done it.

Her *hèn* not only results from all the devastation done by Yahweh, but also from his seeming lenience to the enemies as implied in vv.21c-22a-b:

הַבָּאֵת יוֹם קָרָאֵת v.21c You should bring the day you have
 proclaimed
וַיְהִי כְּמַנִּי and let them be as I

v.22a-b **תְּבָא כָּל־עֲשָׂתָם לִפְנֵיךְ** Let all their wickedness come before you;

ושׁולָל לְמַחְיָה
כַּאשְׁר שָׁלַל תִּלְיָה
עַל כָּל-פְּשָׁעָי
and deal with them
just as you have dealt with me
because of all my transgressions;

In v.21c, Zion articulates her *hèn* that Yahweh has not let the day of punishment come to her enemies. In face of the brutal devastation, her *hèn* builds up to a point that she wants revenge. She earnestly asks Yahweh to deal with her enemy the way he has dealt with her. The expression “let them be as I” in v.21c vents her resentment over her “tragic reversal” brought by her arrogant and merciless enemy (vv.9, 10, 16, 21). The plea reflects Zion’s enormous anger and bitterness, which are emotions of *hèn*. In light of the Zion traditions, Zion’s agony about her distress in the closing line of Lam 1 (v.22c) adds tremendous weight to her accusatory complaint against Yahweh’s *wuqing*, which is a dominant theme in Lam 2.

C. Conclusion

The above study has been a special endeavor which involves: (i) both my objective and subjective capacities; and (ii) my cross-cultural experience and knowledge (Chinese, Western and biblical). The results have been fruitful and intriguing. I applied my knowledge of rhetorical methods, and my experience and understanding of *qing-hèn* to the study of Lam 1. I focused on the rhetoric of the text of the lament and the emotional elements expressed in it. Not only did I analyze the rhetoric of the text, but I also contemplated the emotional elements and their development in the lament. I have illustrated that in the above study (i) the

significance of the reader or interpreter's subjectivity in the process of reading or interpreting laments in the Bible and (ii) the Chinese experience of *qing-hèn* has proven to be a useful tool for reading and interpreting Hebrew laments. *Qing-hèn* not only signifies the deep emotions of the lamentors, but also readily involves the imagination of the readers in perceiving and interpreting such emotions conveyed in the laments. Accordingly, imagination and understanding should work side by side in interpreting Hebrew or Chinese laments.

Alonso-Schökel comments:

It is not right to say that understanding is objective and imagination is subjective. Both understanding and imagination are operations of the subject who contemplates or analyzes. The important thing is to use the faculty which is right for the object.⁶⁷

Since *qing-hèn* cannot be rigidly defined or precisely described, it leaves much room for the imagination of the readers.

For instance, the *hèn* of those who actually experienced the devastation of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. should be different from those who have not. Even people going through the same traumatic experiences such as war and natural disasters may have different feelings. The level of their *hèn* emotions also varies from one person to another. However, allowing our intuition, feelings and imagination to work, we can contemplate from the rhetoric the lamentors use how deep their *hèn* is and what it is like.

Yet, in the above study, I followed the rhetorical methods

closely, so that the study is not merely my own imagination. It is also a result of my critical analysis of the rhetoric of those laments selected for study. Thus, any critical study of Hebrew laments should not neglect the subjectivity of the interpreters. The subjective approach that I have employed is a supplement to the form critical method widely used for the study of Hebrew laments. In the course of my discussion above, I have indicated the limitations of the form critical method and the alternative perspective provided by my subjective approach in interpreting a text or evaluating a textual problem.

Based on the results of the above study, I suggest that the Chinese experience of *qing-hèn* is an appropriate tool also for the study of other genres in the Christian canon which deal with or involve deep emotions. Here below are some relevant examples: Old Testament prophecy (e.g., Isa 1:2-3);⁶⁸ historical narratives (e.g. 2 Sam 1:11-16);⁶⁹ the Psalter;⁷⁰ and gospel narratives (e.g., John 8:1-11).⁷¹ Applying the experience of *qing-hèn* to the critical study of a biblical text, we can appreciate the often neglected emotional elements conveyed in it. These emotional elements often provide significant clues for a more precise or deeper understanding of the text. In the above study, for instance, I have indicated that the emotional factors can sometimes help us to better judge a text with seeming corruption or confusion (e.g., 1:16; 5:22).

To conclude, the above study has indicated that using the

subjective experience of *qing-hèn* to supplement critical rhetorical methods has proven to be both workable and fruitful. The results reveal that critical biblical study should not be confined merely to the analytical work of the human mind. Instead, the heart and the whole person of the interpreter should also be involved in the process of studying or interpreting a biblical lament as well as other types of biblical texts that may bear emotional elements. It would be *hèn* for biblical scholarship to neglect or discredit this.

Notes

¹By subjectivity I refer to one's intuition, feelings and imagination.

²*Qing* (情) and *hèn* (恨) are two types of mutually related and affected emotions. They include a relatively wide range of emotional elements, which I will illustrate in detail below. The expression *qing-hèn* (情恨) can be a combined term in the Chinese language. So, I will treat it as singular throughout the study.

³I confine “Hebrew laments” to those laments collected in the Hebrew Bible.

⁴In the present study, the term “rhetoric” refers to the type and mode of language, in writing or speaking, that the lamentors use to express their grievous emotions in the laments. Since the rhetoric of a lament is shaped by the lamentor’s emotions, the emotional elements in a lament are closely related to its rhetorical style and rhetorical efficacy. See my explanation in the section on “methods” below.

⁵Other crucial factors may include religious beliefs and the social settings of the lamentors. However, in normal circumstances, grievous emotions are the primary force that drives a person to

lament.

⁶The concerns of the methods under the spectrum of historical-critical approach are as follows: textual criticism: issues on the original text; historical criticism: issues on the real history of the text; literary criticism: issues on original textual sources; form criticism: issues on the particular genre and its social setting; and redaction criticism: issues on the emergence of the final text. Here below are examples of work on Hebrew laments done from a historical-critical approach: Walter Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament*, trans. David E. Orton (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987); R. Brandscheidt, *Gotteszorn und Menschenleid: die Gerichtsklage des Leidenden Gerechten in Glgl. 3* (Trier: Paulinus, 1983); F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblica et Orientalia 44; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993); Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965) and *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, trans. Charles Muenchow (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994). On the other hand, the concerns of rhetorical criticism used in biblical studies mainly cover the rhetorical style and/or the persuasive efficacy of a text. For rhetorical style, cf. James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18; A Study in

Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 1 (1953): 97-111; and Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994). For rhetorical persuasiveness, cf. Yehoshua Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion: A Study of Isaiah 40-48* (Bonn: Linguistica biblica, 1981). I am not aware of any major work on Hebrew laments which uses the method of rhetorical criticism.

⁷Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 26.

⁸A text can be either written or oral. It has the capacity of bestowing meaning in virtue of what it is and is open to new understanding. See J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning*, trans. from the Spanish by R. R. Barr (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 16-17.

⁹Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 40.

¹⁰For more on the issue of subjectivity in biblical interpretation, see my discussion on "methods" below.

¹¹Cf. Joseph S. Wu, *Bi Jiao Zhe Hsueh Yu Wen Hua* [Comparing Philosophy and Culture; Chinesel], vol.1 (*Tai Pei: Dung Da Tu Shu Gung Ssu*, 1978), 40.

¹²*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1988 ed., s.v. "Love."

¹³*Bi Jiao Zhe Hsueh Yu Wen Hua*, 49.

¹⁴Wen Tianxiang (文天祥 ; A.D. 1236-1283) is considered a patriotic hero in Chinese history. When the Southern *Song* Dynasty (A.D. 1127-1279) was about to fall to the overpowering Mongolians, he organized a local army to rush to the help of the emperor. Unfortunately, he was captured and became a prisoner of war. He remained loyal to the royal family and refused to serve the Mongolians, despite their generous offer of freedom and wealth. He was eventually executed.

¹⁵Wu, *Bi Jiao Zhe Hsueh Yu Wen Hua*, 51-52. All English translations from *Wu*'s article used in the present study are mine.

¹⁶Death cannot terminate the *qing* between two persons. For instance, *Lu You*, a renowned poet of the Southern *Song* Dynasty, still expressed deep *qing* for his divorced wife whom he loved a great deal forty years after she had passed away. Also, the Chinese consider paying homage to the deceased family members very important. Both the *Qing-ming* (青明; in spring) and *Cung-yang* (重陽; in autumn) festivals are designated for people to pay homage

to their ancestors.

¹⁷ *Yijing* (易經) is also known as The Book of Change. It is a collection of ancient oracles written in the early Western Zhou Dynasty (西周; 770-256 B.C.). It is a book of divination. The oracles are based on the change of the sixty-four hexagrams.

¹⁸ This is indicated in the predominant “intuitive” approach in Chinese philosophy. However, as *Wu* clarifies, the term “‘intuitive’ must not be taken to denote the kind of intuition which is primitive, impulsive, instinctive, unreflective, and anti-scientific. Nor does it denote an occult vision which is possessed only by mystics. It is the kind of intuition which is the natural synthesis of the outcomes of moral maturation, intensive observation, direct experience, and persistent intellectual effort. This kind of methodology defies any ready-made categories in western philosophy.” He adds, “If I have to give it a name, I would call it ‘a natural synthetic intuitive grasp.’” See his *Clarification and Enlightenment: Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 65.

¹⁹ *Wu*, *Bi Jiao Zhe Hsueh Yu Wen Hua*, 50.

²⁰ The term *gan tong* (感通; inner communion with various

entities of the external world) first occurs in *Yijing*. The translation is mine. It refers to one's deep solicitude that unifies one with someone, something, or a place.

²¹Translation is mine. The “two hearts” refer to the heart of the poet and that of his lover to whom he intimately tied, though they could not live together.

²²The term “spirituality” can have a great many different meanings. Here, I define it as “the sensitivity or attachment to spiritual values or things rather than material or worldly interests.” It refers to the lived quality of a person, the way that one understands and lives within one’s historical context; cf. Walter Principe, “Toward Defining Spirituality,” *Studies in Religion* 12 (1983): 135-136.

²³Wu, *Bi Jiao Zhe Hsueh Yu Wen Hua*, 51.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 52.

²⁵I stick to *hèn* instead of *han* throughout the study except in direct quotation from Korean scholars’ works, in which cases, *han* will be used instead. For a review of the recent studies of *hèn*, see Jae Hoon Lee, *The Exploration of the Inner Wounds—Han* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 11-26; see also Andrew Sung Park, *The*

Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

²⁶Lee, *The Exploration of the Inner Wounds—Han*, 2.

²⁷In recent decades, Korean theologians have developed a theology using the concept of *hèn*. It is the central theme of their renowned *Minjung* theology. *Jae Hoon Lee*, a Korean theologian, points out that *hèn* is the main force which shapes every aspect of Koreans' cultural and religious creative activity as well as their feelings and moods about everyday life. He said, "*Han* is a factor determining the quality of people's feelings and moods as experienced in their everyday life." *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²⁸ Some of the *hèn* emotions can be categorized more precisely as *yuan* (怨), which roughly means resentment, animus, hatred, enmity etc. Sometimes, the two terms are combined and become *yuan-hèn* (怨恨) which basically refers the various emotions of *hèn* as listed above. Since *yuan* can be embraced in the category of *hèn*, I will not refer to it specifically in the present study unless necessary.

²⁹One may worry that since these two terms cover a relatively wide range of meanings, they may not be able to precisely describe one's emotions. However, every word in every language

has its limitation in denoting meaning. Moreover, there is always discrepancy between the denoted meaning of a word and the reality that it symbolizes. For issues on meaning of word, see G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 37-61.

³⁰ C. S. Song, *The Tears of Lady Meng: A Parable of People's Political Theology* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981), 1-23. Paragraphing is mine.

³¹ In the traditional Chinese culture, once a woman is married, she is supposed to have absolute allegiance to her husband, no matter whether he is living or dead.

³² Yan Di is one of the three sage kings and five emperors of ancient China at the dawn of human history. He is a legendary ruler supposed to have introduced agriculture and herbal medicine. So, he was also known as *Shen Nong* (神農; the God of Agriculture).

³³ “Bei Shan Jing” in *Shan Hai Jing*. *Shan Hai Jing* is a collection of ancient Chinese myths.

³⁴ Although Lady Meng's *qing* for her husband is personal, it has become a model for all Chinese women. Therefore, her personal *qing* for her husband has generated its socio-cultural effects

throughout its transmission process.

³⁵For studies on rhetorical or stylistic devices in Hebrew poetry, see Luis Alonso-schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, trans. and adapt. by the author (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto, 1988); and Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1986).

³⁶C. S. Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 67ff.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 67. Song also stresses that the theology growing out of the Asian soil must be a passionate theology—"theology with passion, theology done not in our head but in our bowels and in our lungs, theology imagined in our liver and in our heart." *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁸Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 80. Cf. David Tracy, "Theology and the Many faces of Postmodernity." *Theology Today* 51 (1994): 106.

³⁹Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 80.

⁴⁰There has never been a consensus on the authorship of Lamentations. Who wrote the five laments? How many poets or poetesses wrote it? One can never provide definite answers to those

questions. For convenience sake, I regularly use the singular form “lamentor,” “speaker” or “poet” throughout the study, without the intention of suggesting who wrote these five laments. Also, though I use third personal singular for the lamentor or poet, I do not intend to suggest the gender of the writer or writers, who composed the five laments of Lamentations. For discussion of authorship, see Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible 7A; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 10-15; and Provan, *Lamentations*, 7-19.

⁴¹Iain W. Provan is among the few who are skeptical about the catastrophe of 587 B.C. being the background of the book of Lamentations; see his *Lamentations* (The New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 7-19.

⁴²I. G. P. Gous, “A Survey of Research on the Book of Lamentations,” *Old Testament Essays* 5 (1992): 186-191. Three decades ago, Bertil Albrektson also suggested that “Zion traditions are the key to the theology of the book of Lamentations.” See his *Studies in the Text and Theology of the Book of Lamentations: With a Critical Edition of the Peshitta Text* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963), 214-239. For other viewpoints on the issue, consult Claus Westermann, *Lamentations*, 56-58.

⁴³ The term Zion (腇) , according to Jon D. Levenson, has at least four meanings: (i) it refers to the name of a fortress in Jebus (Jerusalem) during the period just before David captured the city from the Jebusites (2 Sam 5:6-7; 2 Chr 11:4-5); (ii) it designates the “Temple Mount” which is also known as “Mount Zion,” the earthly abode of Yahweh (e.g., Am 1:2; Isa 8:18; 24:23; 28:16; 31:4; 33:3; Jer 8:19; 31:6; Lam 5:18; Zech 2:14; 8:2; Joel 2:1-2; 3:16-17, 21; Ps 9:11; 74:2; 76:2; 132:13; 134:3; 146:10; cf. also Ps 50:2; 65:1; 84:5; 99:2; 147:12); (iii) by a process of metonymy it came to refer to Jerusalem, the entire temple city (e.g., Isa 1:8; 3:16; 4:3, 5; 30:19; 60:14; 64:10; Jer 26:18; Lam 1:4, 6, 17; 2:1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13; Ps 84:5; and (iv) by a further use of metonymy, it also refers to the people of Israel (e.g., Isa 4:4; 51:16; Ps 69:35; 78:68; 97:8); Jon D. Levenson, “Zion Traditions,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, et. al., vol. VI (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1098-1102. Cf. also Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult* (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1987), 13-22. Since Zion is often personified as a lady in the Old Testament, I use the feminine singular third person pronoun for “her” throughout the study.

⁴⁴ Form critics may not be able to relate the change of speaking voice to the emotional development in this lament because

their main concern is to analyze its genre and structure. As Westermann comments, for instance, "..., breaking up the material in this way yields no intelligible sense; the arrangement of the material can hardly be explained in this fashion." He regards the change of voice in vv. 9c and 11c merely as a distinct form of a petition to Yahweh. See his *Lamentations*, 139. However, my study below will indicate that reading the lament in light of the lamentor's *qing-hèn* makes significant sense.

⁴⁵The adverbial particle is the longer and more poetical form of the adverb **עַזְךָ**. According to Gordis, both forms are used to express the incredulity and grief (e.g., Isa 1:21; Jer 2:21). See his *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 153.

⁴⁶"Tragic reversal" is a term used by Norman Gottwald. It refers to the devastated reality of the fall of Jerusalem which is a tragic reversal of the holy city's glorious and honorable past. See his *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (rev. ed.; London: SCM Press, 1962), 52-62.

⁴⁷Hillers, *Lamentations*, 64.

⁴⁸The imagery of widow appears in the expression **בָּשָׂר כַּעֲלָת** in v.3b. The expression **בָּשָׂר כַּעֲלָת** is used in Ruth 1:9 for the state of widowhood; Johan Renkema, "The Literary Structure of

Lamentations (I)" in *The Structural Analysis of Biblical and Canaanite Poetry*, ed. W. van der Meer & J. C. de Moor (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1988), 307.

⁴⁹The friends and lovers of Zion are figurative for the faithless allies of Israel, who have been unfaithful to Yahweh by entering into alliance with other nations and gods (e.g., Hos 8:9-10; Ezek 16:28-29; 23:5-21); Hillers, *Lamentations*, 82.

⁵⁰I hesitate to jump to the conclusion that v.7b is an extra line as many scholars would think. The extra line in v.7 should be treated as a rhetorical device to articulate the "tragic reversal" which is a dominant theme of vv.1-9b. First of all, no explanation is fully satisfactory; cf. F. M. Cross, "Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Verse: The Prosody of Lamentations 1:1-22" in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, ed. C. L. Meyers & M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 140-141; and Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 154-155. According to the study of David Noel Freedman, who uses the method of syllable counting, the lengths of Lam 1-3 are more or less the same. The numbers of syllables are: Lam 1: 865; Lam 2: 863; and Lam 3: 868. See his "Acrostics and Metrics in Hebrew Poetry" in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 51-76. So, it would not be appropriate to regard

any line in v.7 as extra. Above all else, intended discrepancy is an effective rhetorical device to attract the readers or audience's attention; cf. Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith Co., 1985), 5ff.

⁵¹Contra the translation “daughter of people” of בָּתְּ-עַם, which is based on interpreting נָסָע as a possessive genitive; cf. W. F. Stinespring “No Daughter of Zion: A Study of the Appositional Genitive in Hebrew Grammar,” *Encounter* 26 (1965): 133-141.

⁵²I disagree with Claus Westermann that vv.7a-9b is a unit separate from vv.1-6. See his *Lamentations*, 127-132. This is a problem of the form-critical method that tends to fragmentize a literary text like Lam 1. In the present case, Westermann fails to see the emotional development of the narration. In fact, v.7 continues the motif “the past glory of Zion is gone” in the preceding verses. The narration in v.7 through v.9b picks up the momentum to portray the *hèn* of Zion. It is another piece of evidence that explains the abrupt appearance of Zion in v.9c. See my discussion below.

⁵³Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) refers to the manuscript Bo Ambr. which renders נָסָע for נָסָע. However, the variant reading is not supported by other major manuscripts. The scribe probably missed the emotional development of the lamentor

and thought that the narration continues and Zion should not appear in v.9c yet. Thus, I think the MT should be followed.

⁵⁴Zion shifts the address to Yahweh in v.11c and the passers-by in v.12a, inviting them to listen to her first-person lamentation.

⁵⁵Dupriez, *A Dictionary of Literary Devices*, s.v. “Apostrophe.”

⁵⁶Alonso-Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 154.

⁵⁷Dupriez, “Apostrophe.”

⁵⁸Cf. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968), 901-905.

⁵⁹Alonso-Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 148, 153-155.

⁶⁰According to J. Milgrom, the term **תְּמִימָה** here in v.10b should refer to Yahweh’s sacred precincts; see his *Studies in Levite Terminology: The Encroacher and the Levite* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970), 23.

⁶¹In the Zion traditions, Zion is the earthly abode of Yahweh (e.g., Pss 9:11; 87:2; 132:13); from there Yahweh grants his blessings and deliverance (e.g., Pss 134:3; 146:10); and she symbolizes Yahweh's word and glory (e.g., Pss 102:21; 110:2; 125:1; 128:5; Isa 4:2).

⁶²The meaning of the verb **רָאשָׁה** is not clear because it only appears here in the Hebrew Bible. I read **רָאשָׁה** (kept vigilant) which is supported by some ancient manuscripts. Cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 73-74; Provan, *Lamentations*, 50-51. Here, the "yoke" is an image signifying the burden of sins (cf. Isa 58:9), which is always around troubling those who sin and cause their strength to fail. I divide each of these two lines according to the agreement of the verb with its corresponding subject. As a result, the consequent problems of Zion's transgressions are highlighted. From a rhetorical point of view, the lamentor is on the one hand confessing the sins of Zion that she deserves punishment; yet on the other, in the *persona* of Zion, he sets up the tone to vent his *hèn* over Yahweh's excessive punishment against her.

⁶³Those who regard the second **שִׁיעָה** as a dittography (e.g., Hillers and Westermann) fail to recognize the building up of Zion's *hèn* emotions since her abrupt appearance in v.9c. The repetition has a parallel in Jer 4:19 (**מִשִּׁיעָה מִשִּׁיעָה אֲחוֹלָה**) (My anguish, my anguish! I

writhe in pain; *NRSV*). In the present context, the repetition of the noun צַעַד vividly pictures how Zion weeps as she laments grievously over the catastrophe of Jerusalem and her daughter people. Thus, the repetition is not redundant but adds poignancy to the line. Cf. Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 159.

⁶⁴Cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 81-82; and Provan, *Lamentations*, 36-37.

⁶⁵The significance of this theme should be noted as it has been repeated five times in this poem.

⁶⁶Form critics may easily miss the development of the lamentor's emotions, i.e., their *qing-hèn*. Cf. the commentaries on Lamentations referred to in the present study. This is an issue too significant to neglect because laments are the products of the lamentors' expression of their *qing-hèn* emotions.

⁶⁷Alonso-Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 141.

⁶⁸Yahweh's *qing* for the children of Israel and his *hèn* for their rebelliousness are explicitly expressed in his oracle. The imageries of a faithful ox and the unfaithful children of Israel provide us with an idea how deep Yahweh's *hèn* is.

⁶⁹David's *qing* for Saul and Jonathan drastically intensified his *hèn* over their deaths. As a result, he killed the man who assisted Saul to kill himself (2 Sam 1:9-10).

⁷⁰Almost every psalm involves the *qing* and/or *hèn* of the psalmist. Other types of psalms such as "praises" involving the psalmists' *qing* for what they praise, whereas "prayers" often involve one's *qing* and *hèn*, depending on what is being prayed for.

⁷¹Jesus' *qing* for the woman who was taken to him by the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees is revealed in his forgiveness to her. His *qing* is his compassion for the desperately shamed woman. We can also feel the *hèn* of the woman in the great shame that she was entangled. Jesus' *hèn* over those leaders' hypocrisy is indicated in the potent question that he asked them in v.7: ".... Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." (NRSV).

Response

Dr. Andres S. K. Tang
Professor, Lutheran Theological Seminary
Hong Kong

Thank you for Dr. Yuen's presentation. I have to confess firstly that I am not an expert on biblical study, of course, including Old Testament. Therefore, in the following my response will be somewhat of general, not systematic and academic enough.

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Yuen for his reading/interpreting of Lamentations from a Chinese perspective, especially focusing on "qing-hen". Though most biblical scholars talk about the necessity of pre-understanding in the process of reading/interpreting a text, they seldom explicitly clarify their pre-understanding and make use of it in reading/interpreting. However, Dr. Yuen's attempt in his paper can be seen as a kind of reading/interpreting text from his own cultural pre-understanding which is stated explicitly in advance. This is an important demonstration for inter-cultural interpretation. We cannot just say that our Chinese reading/interpreting must be influenced/ affected by our cultural pre-understanding. We have to clarify what this/these pre-understanding/pre-understandings is/are, on the one hand, and on the other hand to make use of this pre-understanding as some kind of tool/means/perspective/framework in the process of reading/interpreting. And only by doing so, can we further investigate and study closely whether such a reading/interpreting is fruitful or not. I would like to say this kind of reading/interpreting should be encouraged. Maybe there remains much to be improved. However, if we do not try, we will go

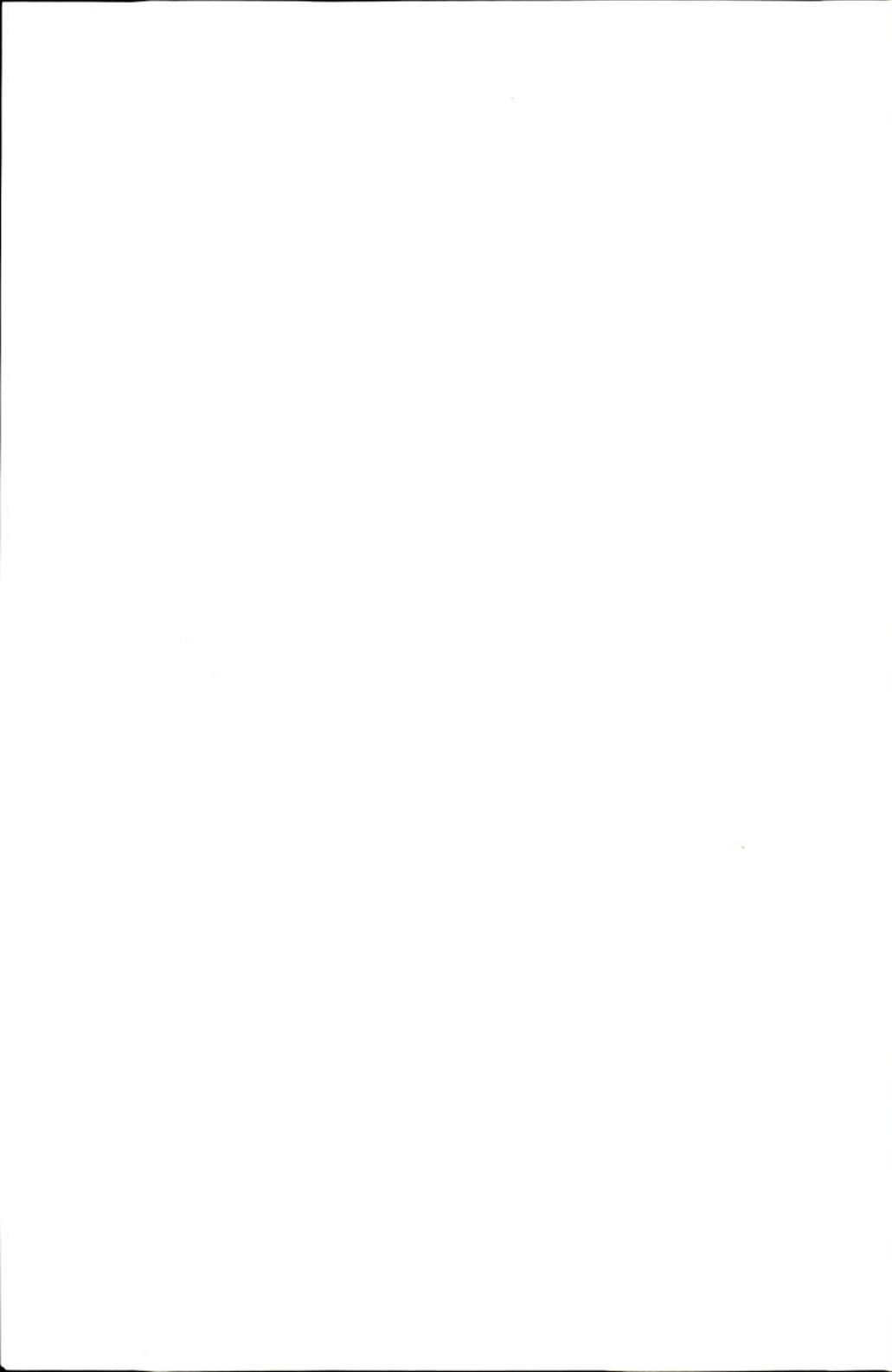
nowhere. It is in this sense that I welcome Dr. Yuen's attempt done here.

Now I go to the second point. Dr. Yuen says that "a shortcoming of the study of Hebrew laments in today's biblical scholarship is the common neglect of the emotional elements conveyed in the rhetoric of laments". (p.114) To my knowledge, this is a very significant observation. It implies that scholars are not interested in or concerned with the emotional elements of laments. Why? Dr. Yuen quotes James Muilenburg to explain this. (see p.115) However, I would like to point out that for these scholars trained within their western biblical tradition, they tend to see truth as objective, not subjective. Doubtless, this is their own cultural pre-understanding. It is their concept of truth that leads them to neglect the emotional elements, i.e. the subjective aspect, of laments. On the one hand, although they are aware that throughout the process of writing laments the lamentors' emotions play a certain role, they just treat these laments as some kind of expression in words which are objective, without any interest in the subjective emotions. On the other hand, it follows that subjective reading/interpreting would be unnecessary, or even inappropriate. Once the text is treated as something objective, the only proper way of reading/interpreting should be objective as well. A correspondence should be kept between these two, i.e. the text and the reading.

Therefore, my third point is that if our understanding of truth expressing or manifesting itself through text differs from the western biblical tradition, then our way of reading/interpreting would be different. Although the laments as text are objective, the emotions they express are not objective. In this sense, we would say that the lament text has two dimensions, objective and subjective. It is an objective text expressing subjective emotions. If we follow the principle of correspondence, then our reading/interpreting should be both objective and subjective. For the sake of grasping the subjective emotions of the lamentors, some kind of subjective reading/interpreting is necessary. Yet, as Dr. Yuen points out, "although it takes our subjective perception to feel the lamentors' emotions, critical study of the laments is possible because we are confined by the rhetoric of the given text". (p.115)

Finally, I conclude my response with a fourth point. In the Chinese culture "qing" and "hen" are two different words with opposite meanings. However, they can be combined to form a third word, "qing-hen". For this reason, the expression "qing-hen" is very Chinese. To my knowledge, there is another German word "sublation" (aufhebung) that consists of opposite meanings, preserving and abolition. In fact, the word "qing-hen" precisely expresses the close relationship between these two opposite feelings. As pointed out by Dr. Yuen, "qing and hen are so usually closely related that they can intensify or reduce each other".(p.121) And it

is precisely this understanding of the dynamic relationship of these two contradictory emotions that plays a crucial role in Dr. Yuen's reading/interpreting Lamentations. Although it is true that to a certain extent people of different cultures share the same emotions, their expressions are various. With the category of "qing-hen" taken from the Chinese culture, one can understand much more in depth the mixed emotions of Lamentations. Dr. Yuen's paper is a very illuminating one for inter-cultural interpretation.



Section Four



**The Role of the Bible in the Growth of
the Church in China**

**Rev. Chen-Fang Lo
Professor, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary
China**

The Bible bears witness to Christ and only through the Bible can we know the salvation of God. The Bible is the Word of God that gives life. God speaks to us through the Bible. The Chinese church firmly believes that not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Bible until all is accomplished.

1. The Role of the Bible in Building the Christian Life

The Bible is indispensable for the growth of the church. During the Cultural Revolution in China from 1966-1976 the tangible church no longer existed. In the region of Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, though the Bibles were all burned, Christians copied the Bible with their hands. They trained their children to memorize the scriptures. When the children grew up to be young people they became preachers. When Nanjing Union Theological Seminary reopened in 1981 a student came from Wenzhou who had been preaching since the age of 15. When the Chinese church walked through the valley of the shadow of death she feared no evil because the Word of God was with her. The Christians in Wenzhou were familiar with the Bible. They not only memorized the Bible but also obeyed the teachings in the Bible in their lives. Some of them have read through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation more than 100 times. They practised the words in the Bible and preached the Bible. The number of Christians was increasing during the Cultural Revolution in secret, but people would say that the church no longer existed. In the early 80's when the church resumed its

legitimate status, in the region of Wenzhou 300,000 Christians emerged from the underground church. In 1996 the number has increased by twofold, i.e. 620,000 Christians, which is 10 percent of the total population. Multitudes of Christians go to church among whom most are young people. You can imagine that many volunteer preachers are in the pulpit.

The Chinese government is sympathetic to the church because there are no criminals and evasion of taxation among Christians. There are also fewer cases of divorce among Christians. Many Christians have become factory directors and managers and Christians play an important role in the economic development of the region.

The growth of the church starts from the growth of every Christian in working out his/her salvation. St. Peter says, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation" (1Pet 2:2). "Spiritual milk here means the milk of the word of God. The Christians in Wenzhou were nurtured by the word of God. When they were children they began to memorize the scriptures and they were strengthened spiritually and developed full-fledged Christian life. This is true for all Christians. In the following I would like to cite the personal testimony of Dr. Li Bixia who was invited twice to participate in the breakfast prayer meeting in the White House. She is a very famous Chinese Christian and a famous pediatrician. The following is her

testimony:

“I was awarded M.D. degree in the summer of 1936 by Peking (Beijing) Union Medical College (P.U.M.C.). In the same summer we had a discussion about whether Jesus is the Son of God. I denied the Sonship of Jesus during the discussion. After that I felt that I had committed a great sin. The Bible explicitly tells us that Jesus Christ ‘was declared to be Son of God with power by resurrection from the dead’ (Rom. 1:4). When I was only 40 days old I was really dead and God saved my life. But afterwards I should have denied the Sonship of Jesus and God would surely discipline me (Heb. 12:6).

“During that summer I had a high fever and was in the hospital of P.U.M.C. The doctor told me that I was suffering from typhoid, an incurable disease at that time. I began to read the New Testament from the first page and felt that the word of God was sweeter than honey. I finished reading the New Testament in seven days. God spoke to me through the Bible. ‘Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...’ ‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one’. Before God human righteousness is like rags, giving off an unbearable stink. ‘The wages of sin is death’. ‘After death the judgment’. I denied that Jesus is the Son of God, which is the greatest sin. I shivered all over my body and did not know what to do.

“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (John 1:9). I had been confined in my bed for many days but then I knelt on the bed and began to pray. I confessed my sins before God and prayed that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, cleanse all my sins with his blood and forgive all my unrighteousness. I said, ‘Lord, open my heart, come in and live in my heart and be my Saviour. Let the Lord govern me, and I will live for the Lord, in Jesus’ name, Amen.’

“As soon as I said ‘Amen’ my fever was gone and I did not swoon any more. Thereupon I recovered from illness perfectly. The doctor came in and saw my perfect recovery. She was amazed and asked how I had recovered. I answered that when I began to pray in Jesus’ name I recovered.

“The doctor exclaimed, ‘Wonderful, wonderful, I will believe in Jesus.’”

I first saw Dr. Li Bixia in the summer of 1985 at a conference of Chinese and American Christians in Nanjing. She was about 70 years old at that time. I was very much impressed by her prayer in a meeting. She knelt on the floor overpowered by the Holy Spirit. After about three years I saw her again in the house of a retired colleague of mine in Beijing. She brought many booklets with her for disseminating the gospel. The third time I say her was in her house in Shanghai where she was lying in bed because of illness. A brother in Christ was with us and we three prayed together in a very good spiritual atmosphere. Dr. Li Bixia lives a selfless life and has saved the lives of many Chinese babies. She was well educated and is a famous Chinese Christian. From the above testimony of hers we can see how the word of God changed the life of a Christian. In the following I would like to cite the testimony of an illiterate woman, sister Sun Jinlan, whose life was transformed by the Bible.

Now she is 59 years old. She began to know Christ ten years ago. Before that her daughter died at about 20 years of age. She could not stand such severe bereavement; she would wash her face with tears for more than one year. Sister An, a Christian woman, began to be concerned about her and always prayed for her, but her first response was negative. Sister An was not discouraged and continued to pray for her. After two years she was willing to go to church and Sister An gave her a Bible. At first she could not read it but she began to learn how to read and from the Bible she knew that

she is a sinner. After learning for two or three years she could read through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and had read Psalms three or four times. She began to confess her sins. Her Baptism is the turning point in her life. Only the Bible can comfort her and God has wiped all her tears. She examines herself by the standard given in the Bible. She understands that the Lord disciplines her and she kneels while reading the Bible and receives God's word from it. She feels that she must read the Bible by faith because the word of God is too wonderful. In the days of her weakness she read Matthew 27:46: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" She was deeply moved by these words. She understood that the death and suffering of Christ are for her sake. From these words of Christ on the cross she obtained strength and kept a burning heart to love the Lord. She would grasp the words of God and let God's words enter her heart. She lives on the words of God as her spiritual bread.

She learned how to sing hymns and play the organ. She is a member of the choir conducted by my wife. When she was reading Matthew 10:8: "You received without payment; give without payment," she began to preach the Bible from Genesis. She would visit the patients in hospitals and preach the gospel to them. She went to the poorest region in another province where the people only had rice and pickled vegetables for food in winter. She persisted in staying there for more than a month, preaching and teaching the

people to sing hymns and Church members how to play the organ in church. Recently she wrote a play based on Ruth for the Christmas of 1996.

The Bible is vital for the growth of the church. Now in China in addition to the 13 theological schools in which the Bible is taught there are many Bible schools and numberless training classes for volunteer workers of the church. Professional preachers cannot cope with the immense need of millions of Christians.

2. The Role of the Bible in the Environment in Which the Church Grows

Jesus in his parables of the mustard seed and leaven teaches the inevitable growth of the kingdom of God. The gospel began to be preached in the last half of the nineteenth century in China and the Bible was translated into vernacular Chinese in the early twentieth century. The influence of the Bible can be seen in the writings of modern Chinese writers. In the 20's of this century there was the new cultural movement marked by the revolution of literature -- to advocate vernacular Chinese literature instead of the old classical Chinese. The Chinese Bible is the best specimen of vernacular Chinese and it exerted great influence on modern Chinese writers.

The chief champion of the Chinese new cultural movement was Lu Xun. He did some study of Old Testament literature and the

Hebrew people, of which he writes: "The human mind must be dependent on something and it cannot stand without faith."

In his famous short story "Revenge" he writes about the Risen Christ:

"He stands towering like a giant, sees clearly all the ruins and desolate graves that have been transformed or remain unchanged, remembers all the deep, widespread and age-old sufferings, confronts all the clotted blood that is overlapping and deposited and thoroughly understands all the people that are dead, being born, to be born in the future or unborn. He sees through the tricks of nature. He will bring humankind back to life, or wipe out all humankind who are the subjects of the Creator.

"The Risen Christ will be the real valiant warrior."

Lu Xun's critics would say that Lu Xun is a type of resistant, suffering and solitary Jesus.

Another prominent leader of the Chinese new cultural movement was Chen Duxiu who was also first leader of the Chinese Communist Party. In his article "Christianity and the Chinese" he writes:

"It is necessary to cultivate the sublime and great personality and the enthusiastic emotion of Jesus in our blood, to save us from the cold-blooded, dark and filthy pit into which we fall."

The famous modern Chinese essayist Zhou Zuoren took interest in studying biblical literature. He writes: "The Book of Jonah expresses the noble spirit of universalism and the Sermon on the Mount has the spirit of universal love." He thought that

Christianity is suitable for giving a new spirit to the Chinese. During the nationwide anti-Christian movement in 1922 Zhou published a declaration for the freedom of belief.

Bajin, the famous modern Chinese novelist, advocated the philosophy of love and life. He writes: "Death is the door leading to eternal life. The sacrificial life is the first condition of true life."

In his novel "New Life" he quotes John 12:24: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit." He uses this verse as the theme of the above novel.

Tian Han was a famous modern Chinese dramatist. During the early years of the invasion of the Japanese militarists against China, he composed the words of "March of the Volunteers", which later has become the national anthem of People's Republic of China. In his writing he shows his appreciation of Jesus' being anointed by a sinful woman in the seventh chapter of Luke. He writes, "Nothing is more lovely, more artistic and holier than that incident and that passage; since Jesus has such power to affect people he is worthy to be the founder of a religion."

Among the famous modern Chinese writers only a few are Christians and Bingxin is one of them. She was professor of Chinese literature in a famous Christian university, Yenching

University, my Alma Mater. When I was a student there I often saw her in the chapel at Sunday services. Bingxin is famous as a poet and novelist who writes about the love of the sea and the love of children. She advocates the spirit of Jesus which is love and sacrifice. Her ideal supreme personality is the evangelist like Paul who was in the chains of mysterious love. For her Jesus is the exponent of perfect love and perfect sacrifice.

The aforesaid was the state of affairs before liberation. In the early years of the People's Republic it was estimated that the number of Chinese Protestants amounted to 700,000 and after forty years by the most conservative estimate the number has increased to 12,000,000. Now the Bible enjoys high respect among Chinese intellectuals. Several years ago a press for publishing translated books planned to prepare a new version of the Bible for Chinese intellectuals. The chief translator, Prof. Yang Huilin, is a non-Christian scholar. He has written a book on Christian theology. In the autumn of 1994 I participated in a seminar sponsored by Yenching Graduate Institute. The subject for discussion was "Western Literature and Christianity." Most of the participants were non-Christian scholars who are teachers of biblical literature in the universities all over the country. I have never seen before that so many Chinese scholars show so much interest in the Bible. Prof. Zhu Weizhi, an expert in biblical literature, was over ninety. His student read his treatise for him at the seminar. The subject of his

treatise is "The Proper Place of New Testament Literature in the History of Literature." The following is a passage from his treatise:

"The newness of the New Testament consists not only in its new literary form but also in a new spirit infused in the literary trend of thought. The old stylistic characteristic of the European Greek and Roman classical literature is its emphasis on reality and reason. However, people should always have some spirit and should have faith and ideals. The contribution of early Christian literature to European literature is its spirit, faith and ideals and early Christian literature is another source of European literature. It was just because of such spirit that the barehanded Christians spread all over the whole Graeco-Roman world in spite of severe persecutions by the Roman Empire and during the period of over 200 years completely defeated it and its powerful legions."

Revelation foretells that the holy city, the new Jerusalem, will come down to earth from heaven and that the nations will walk by its light (Rev. 21:21,24). Likewise, the nations will also walk by the light of the Bible. In recent years the light of the Bible even shines on some Communists. In the following I will quote from an article by Principal Zhang Yunshi of the School of Finance and Economics in a city in the Province of Shandong. He is one of the local leaders of the Communist Party. The title of his article is "The Bible Is a Great Achievement of the Spiritual Civilization of Humankind." The words of this title are in accordance with the words of Deng Xiaoping, Leader of the Chinese people. Deng said, "we must boldly assimilate and make use of all the achievements of civilization created by the society of humankind." Principal Zhang rather thinks the Chinese may completely assimilate and make use of the Bible boldly. The following are some passages from his article.

"The purpose of the Bible is to do good and save the world. The moral ideal of the Bible is divine love. The Bible gives the guiding principle of governing the country with love, justice and law.

"A leader of a city in the Province of Shandong delivered a political report at a meeting of government reform, in which he quoted a passage from Ecclesiastes 5:10-19. He warned the people that they should not be 'a lover of money'. They should not indulge themselves in eating and drinking and should not be corrupted and degenerated. For as they came from their mothers' wombs, so they shall go again, naked as they came.

"The miraculous effect of the Bible is that it gives men wisdom, peace and joy. The philosophy of the Bible is dialectical, realistic and having foresight. According to Marxist philosophy the absolute truth exists objectively and humankind can only know a tiny part of it but can never know the whole truth. Man can only approach absolute truth but can never reach it. The so-called 'The true God who governs our world' can be regarded as the objective law and absolute truth. Before this objective law and absolute truth people can only get to know it, adapt to it and obey it. Isn't this just the mystery of the God of truth?"

Principal Zhang tries to convince some government leaders who are doubtful about or hostile to Christianity. He writes:

"The Bible teaches that people should obey the authorities and not rebel (Rom. 13:1-5). Furthermore, Christians come together because of their hunger and thirst after righteousness and for the purpose of seeking the truth. In their meetings they read the Bible, sing hymns and share with one another their testimonies of doing good and showing the inner spiritual beauty. They pray and do spiritual exercises for the purpose of paying the debt to love one another better. They come before God of their own will, not for the purpose of winning promotion and getting rich or for worldly eating and drinking Their lives are a sharp contrast to and poles apart from worldly mammonism, corruption, theft, degeneration, bribery and falsehood."

He concludes his article by quoting Psalms 19:7-11 to express

his joy and praise to God.

The Holy Spirit works through the Bible which is the Word of God. He works both in the church and outside. The growth of the church is not only numerical but also spiritual, just as St. Paul teaches in Ephesians that "rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Eph 4:15)." The church will grow up in love as it conforms its life more and more to that of its head, i.e. Christ. Christ is the goal and source of the growth of the church. The Bible helps Christians to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). There is still a long, long way to go before the Chinese church attains to mature manhood but Chinese Christians hunger and thirst for the Word of God. From 1987 to 1995 Amity Press completed printing 10,000,000 copies of the Bible. Now Chinese Christians need not copy the Bible with their hands and they are grateful that God provides them all they need.



Response

Dr. Andrew W. M. NG
Professor, Lutheran Theological Seminary
Hong Kong

Being an eye witness, Professor Lo's paper is informative in providing the first hand cases regarding the use of the Bible in the lives of Chinese Christians in mainland China. It is also instructive to learn that some of the progressive intellectuals in the twenties and enlightened communist leaders nowadays hold the teachings of the Bible in high regard. Indeed the Bible always serves as springboard of inspiration for anyone who is concerned with the common good and dignity of humankind. My response intends to focus on the topic of professor Lo's paper, namely "The Role of the Bible in the Growth of the Church in China." Why do the Chinese Christians take the Bible so seriously? Lay persons, whether educated as Dr. Li Bixia or uneducated as Sun Jinlan, among many others, live exemplary lives according to the teachings of the Scripture. Their testimonies draw many to Christ and as a result the church grows under difficult conditions.

The preeminence of the Bible in the life of the church is typical of any pre-Christian land. During the pre-Nicene era when Christians were a minority facing hostilities, lay persons took the Scripture seriously and became actively involved in church work. The churches in north Ethiopia, the Black Sea and Serapis of Egypt were planted by lay persons. The church order of *Apostolic Tradition* (c. A.D. 217) witnesses to laypersons serving as instructors for the catechumens. If they had the gift of teaching they could preach to the congregation as long as they did not preach

before a bishop as in the case of Origen. Leo was the first one to prohibit lay preaching.¹ Only up to the Council of Quinisext (A.D. 692), laymen were 'cut off' for forty days if they preached and taught publicly.² We observe that the demise of the Bible as the driving force of the church directly coincides with inception of catholicism and the ascension of clerical leadership. The church stressed the necessity of *regula fides* and apostolic succession to provide historical continuity to fend off the ahistorical Gnostic heresy. Now the Christians have something to identify with besides the Bible, namely the creeds, councils and the hierarchy. The Post-Nicene church developed the Christian culture and people were born as Christians. In contemporary Europe confirmation simply becomes the rite of passage into adulthood. And not a few people seldom go to the church after confirmation. The Next time they walk into the church is for a wedding and may be, the third time they are being carried to the church for their funeral.³ They think they are Christians because they grow up in the church and espouse Christian culture. Therefore many Christians in the state church in Europe are nominal and are not serious with the Bible. On the other hand, people attending the free churches in Europe have a sense of mission and take their faith and Bible more seriously. The free church movement is remarkable and brings a fresh breeze into the life of the church. Though they do not have church tax for revenue the churches grow far faster than the state church supported by a church tax in many parts of Europe.

In China, the suppression and even eradication of Christian institutions may serve to bring in the rejuvenation of the pre-Christian environment which in turn adduces the preeminence of the Bible. The anti-Christian movement in the twenties resulted in the restoration of educational rights in which Bible and theology were excluded from school curriculum. Antiforeignism came to a climax in 1927 as the Northern Expedition Army entered Nanjing to unify the country. Diplomats were attacked. John William, vice-president of Nanjing University was shot. Among the 8000 missionaries only 500 risked their lives to stay behind in China. After 1949 and especially during the decade long cultural revolution, Christian church buildings were occupied, Christian hospitals and universities were confiscated. Before the opening up and return of church properties all visible Christian institutions were suppressed and in the worst case uprooted. Now Christians only identify themselves with the Bible. The church becomes the church of the Word. A Similar case happened during the epoch of the Diaspora in the Old Testament when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. When the Levitical priesthood was disbanded, sacrifices prohibited, what else could the Israelites identify themselves with as God's chosen people? As we know the synagogues sprang up in the Diaspora and Israelites came to appreciate the Torah. They are the people of the Law. Also they came to their mission consciousness as they were dispersed among the heathen. They maintained high ethical standards and strictly

observed the Sabbath. Thus cultic accentuation gave way to ethical accentuation since the temple was destroyed or was too far away after it was rebuilt. Likewise in China, Christians express their faith in upholding high ethical standards and win the respect of local authorities.

The situation in China resembles the pre-Nicene church, when Christian institutions were not yet well developed as a result of secularization.⁴ The church then identified herself with the Bible. When a salaried ministry was not in place in the first hundred years, the lay persons had the boldness to teach and preach wherever they went. Rejuvenation of the early church situation takes place in China as well as in many other mission fields where lay persons are mobilized to evangelize and teach the Bible in face of the vast need of the mission field. In the Christian countries or post-Christian countries such as Europe or America, you need to have a license to preach publicly. And getting permission to preach means to go through several years of austere theological education. Exposition of the Bible becomes the monopoly of the clergymen. Educated lay persons are reluctant to study the Bible as seriously as their own secular field.

The cases related in professor Lo's paper are confined to Christians' exemplary lives. I hope in the future we may find some cases of Christians using the Bible to engage themselves in the common concerns of the country such as the campaign for the

‘Building Up of the Socialist Spiritual Civilization.’ Unless the Bible speaks to the societal and national needs the church can not experience rapid and wholesome growth. Christian faith is a confessed faith. And confession has an audience and context. The Christian testimonies cited in the professor’s paper indicate sanctification of separation-dedication tendency. The church is prone to have such an attitude when she lives in an adverse environment. This world is not my home, and I am just a pilgrim. However, when the country is ‘probing the stones to cross the river’⁵, can the Bible shed some light on the water? Render to Caesar the dues which belong to Caesar. What does the Bible say to us Chinese Christians as we render dues to Caesar as intelligent Christian citizens?

Notes

¹ *Letter*, 119(92).6; 120(93).6

² Canon 64; Mansi, 11:971; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*[2], 14:394.

³ When I attended a confirmation service in Zurich in May, 1996, the church is full of people many of whom are relatives of the candidates and they do not show up on other Sundays. I was invited to share some words in that I said the candidates are blessed because their parents support and encourage them to be confirmed but my parents are not yet Christians. After the service someone from the Free Church tradition commended me: “your sharing is the most meaningful in the whole service. Many of these Christians are not real Christians....”

⁴ By secularization, I mean the church coming to terms with the *seculum*, taking roots in her context and builds up her Christian culture.

⁵ These are the words of Deng Siu Ping that describe the daring and adventurous economic reform calling for caution and unyielding spirit.



Appendix



The Bible and Chinese Women

Ms. Ren-Hua Chi
Bible Teacher, Northeast Bible Seminary
China

The Bible was translated into the Chinese language in the middle of the 19th century. The language which was used in the Chinese Bible is simple language, and the Chinese woman, unlike the Chinese man in high society, used the elementary Chinese. So Chinese women have been able to read the Bible since 100 years ago. The Bible has been the light and the food of the spirit of the Chinese Christian woman.

There was one period during this time, in which there was no Bible in China. That was called the “Cultural Revolution”. During that time all the Bibles were burnt or taken away by “Red Guards”. Nevertheless, Christians in China were eager to read the Bible and many bore witness. I would like to share two examples with you in the following.

There is a woman who is 84 years old this year. In the beginning of the “Cultural Revolution” she hid her Bible under the ground. But because she was afraid that it would be discovered, she took it out again and wrapped it up with plastic, and put it into a crock under thick sauce. When she got it out after three years it had been drenched by the sauce. Her eyes overflowed with tears and her heart with sorrow. But then she got a new Bible in 1981. Because of her experience she now loves the Bible much more and she reads the Bible everyday, with glasses, even though she is now 84 years old. That woman is my mother.

There is another woman who is 67 years old now and her name is Cheng Cai-Yun. She became a Christian in 1946 when she was a student at nursing school in Shanghai. Since becoming a Christian, the Bible has been her inseparable "friend". She says, "The Bible gave me so much light and strength in my life, that I could not count it all."

However, she also could not read the Bible during the "Cultural Revolution", for her Bible was taken away by "Red Gurard". One day she received a "Red Book" by mail from her friend. During the "Cultural Revolution" some of the Christians handcopied all the Bibles which had survived. In order to read the Bible, some Christians divided one Bible into 66 small books, then covered them with red paper and exchanged them with each other by mail. When Cheng Cai-Yun opened her book, she found it was the Bible – the book of The Chronicles. She was pleasantly surprised at that. In the past, she had not liked to read it, for it was all about genealogy. But now it looked different. She read it carefully and felt it was so interesting and significant. For example, Chronicles recorded the history of 19 kings. Among them, some kings were good, and some kings were bad. Whether good or bad, their behavior was all related to their mothers. Rehoboam's mother was Naamah the Ammonitess, and he had not been kind to his people. The Bible mentions several times that Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonitess. The Bible also tells us that many foreign women, including

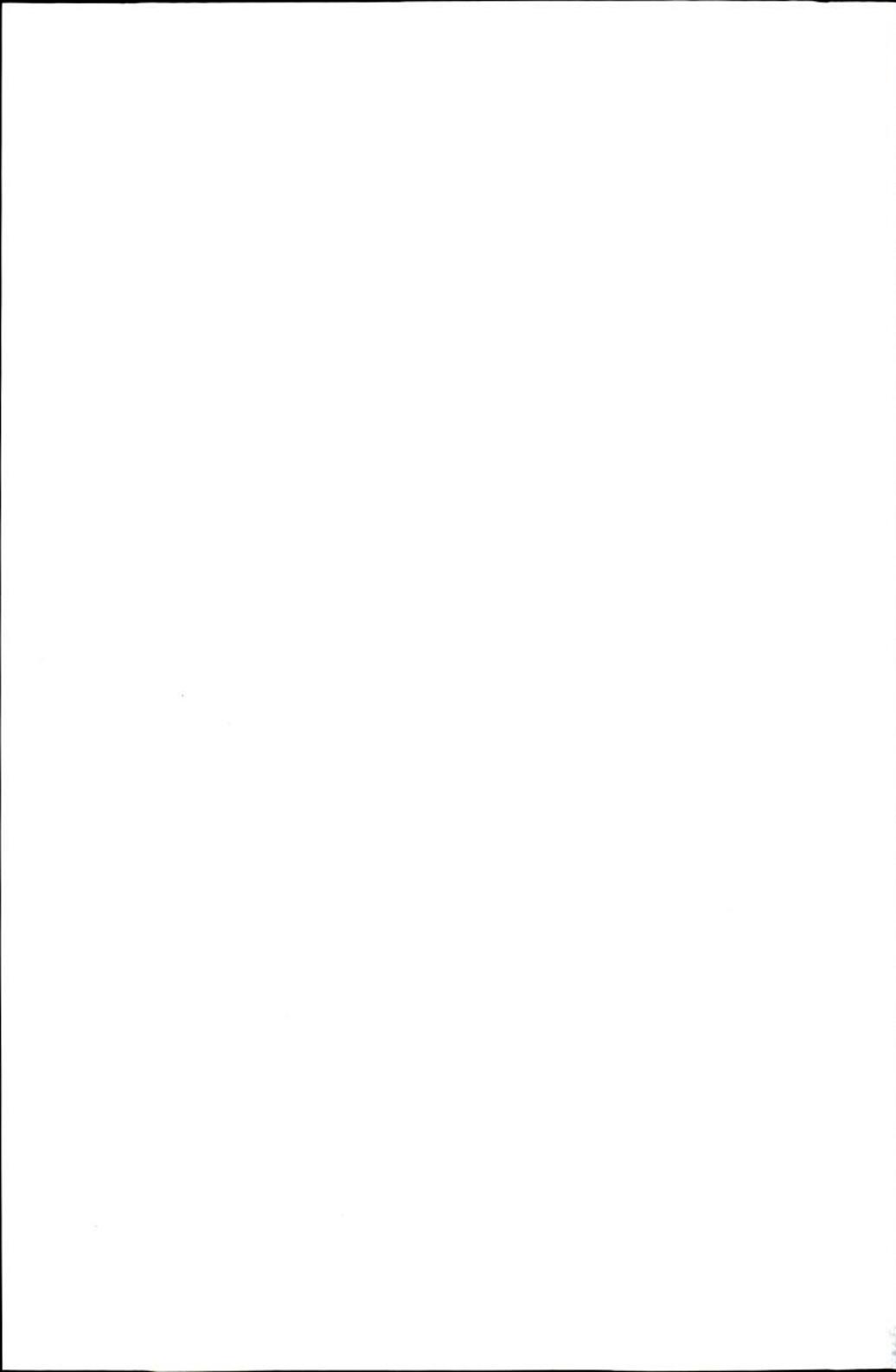
Ammonites turned Solomon's heart away after their gods (1 Kings 11:1-3). So we can say that Naamah, Rehoboam's mother, turned Solomon's heart away from God and her son's as well. Rehoboam "did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord" (2 Chronicles 12:14). When he was king of Judah after Solomon, the country was divided into two parts – South and North. Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he began to reign in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah. The Bible says, "He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor in doing wickedly" (2 Chronicles 22:3). Because he walked in wickedness, according to his mother's way, he reigned only one year in Jerusalem.

The New Testament also mentions Timothy's faith, saying, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you" (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy received a good faith from his grandmother and his mother. Cheng Cai-Yun came to feel that a mother's teaching was very important for her children. She thought she should take up her responsibility for her six children and five grandchildren who were given to her by God. From then on, she taught them to study the Bible and worship God in their family every day. Her youngest daughter was five years old at that time; she could even recite some Bible verses, although she didn't know the meaning exactly. Now all of her six children have become Christians and her youngest daughter is working in the Hang-Zhou

Seminary as a teacher, after graduation from the Nan-Jing Theological Seminary.

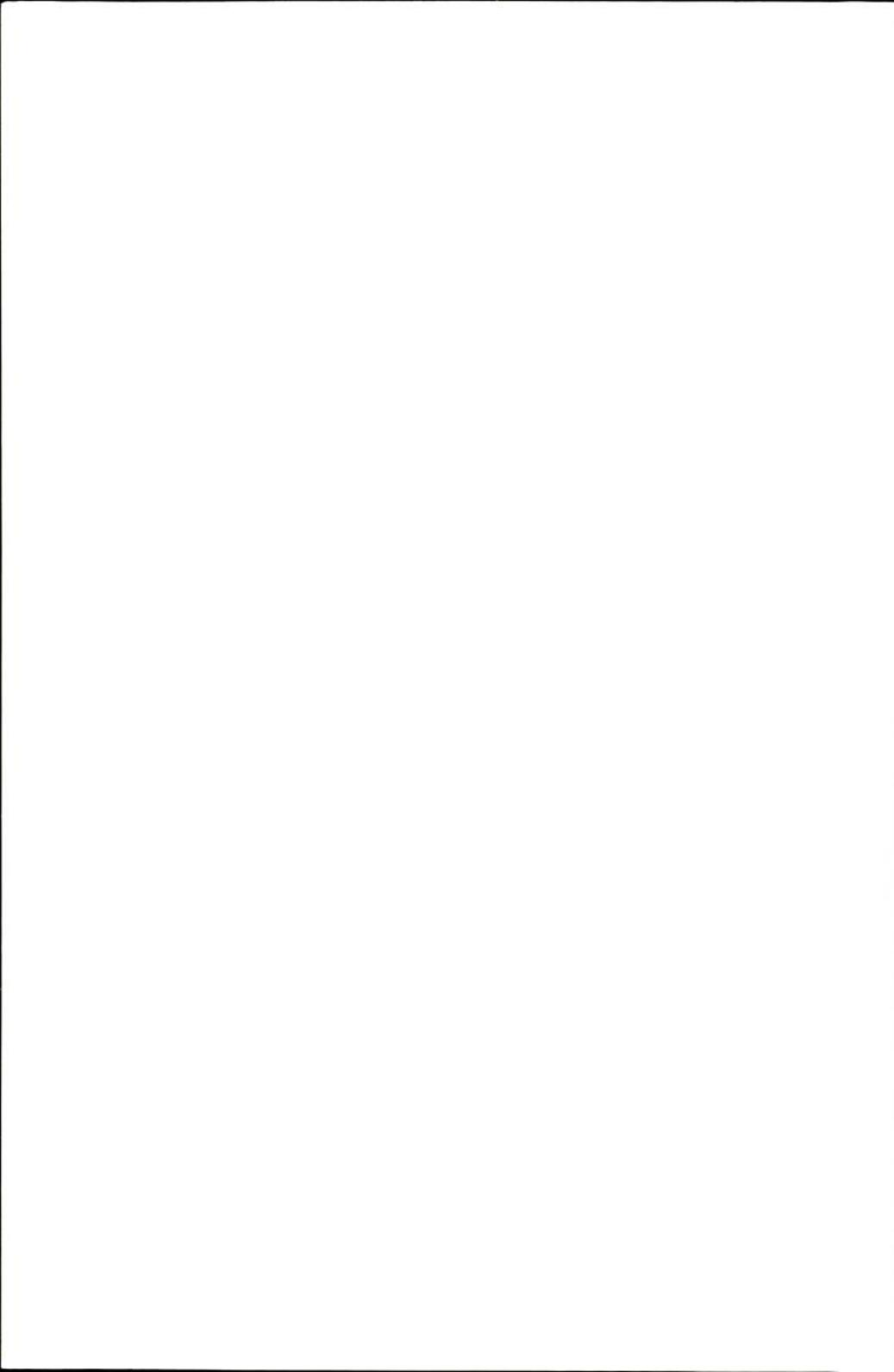
Because of these experiences, Chinese Christians read the Bible earnestly now. Almost every church has a Bible study time before the service on Sunday. Some churches have special groups of Bible study for youth or for women on weekdays. The Xi-Ta Church where I belong has a women's Bible study group. They like to recite the Bible from memory. Last month about 90 women, among whom some were as old as 84, were reciting over 100 Bible verses in one voice like a choir. It took over 30 minutes to recite all of them. Christians in China like to study the Bible, and to keep the Word in their minds, because the Word is really the light of their ways and the food of their spirits.

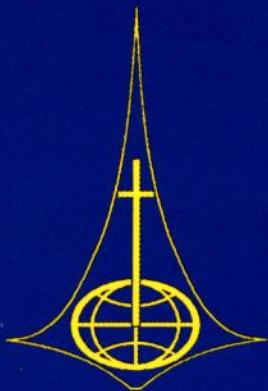
In order to provide Bibles for the needs of the Christians, the Chinese Christian Council has published more than 8 million up to now. Among the Christians in China, the number of women is now much greater than that of men. The number of Women pastors and ministers is increasing, and most of the lay workers are women. Women will play an important part in the future of the Chinese Church.











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**Department for Theology and Studies,
150 Route de Ferney, P. O. Box 2100,
Ch-1211, Geneva 2, Switzerland**

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